

SEGA GAMES ON PLAYSTATION? It's shocking but true. Read the full story on page 14

PC CD-ROM ■ PlayStation ■ Sega Saturn ■ 3DO ■ Nintendo 64 ■ M2 ■ Arcade ■ Online

283
hot, new
videogames
rated

NEXT GENERATION

Leading edge video game

July 1996

**Are you
connected?**

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on multiplayer
online gaming

Sega's Secret Weapon

Rave Racer
Namco's classic
racer hits the PC

From the crack team that brought
you *Sonic the Hedgehog* comes the
most **revolutionary** 32-bit game yet

volume two

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Yuji Naka was the hot-shot Sega programmer responsible for 1991's revolutionary *Sonic the Hedgehog*. *Nights* is his first 32-bit project and, as gamers wait with bated breath, Sega hopes *Nights* will do for Saturn what *Sonic* did for Genesis

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07 >

QUAKE: Does 'Id's follow-up to *Doom* live up to the hype? • **SONIC EXTREME:** Sonic's 32-bit debut!



Sega: back in the game

"The two things we do very well are **make great games** and **market them successfully**,"

conceded Sega of America's President Tom Kalinske in January 1994. He's right, of course. And now Sega is relying on

these two core **strengths** to stay in the **next-generation race**.

PlayStation took Saturn's best shot (*Virtua Fighter 2*, *Sega Rally Championship*, and *Virtua Cop* — actually, make

that a three-hit combo), **wobbled a little**, but stayed on its feet. PlayStation's **sales**

advantage over Saturn narrowed, but never to the extent that Sony feared being overtaken.

So now Sega has to try other **tactics**. It has to pick **new weapons** with which to fight PlayStation and

Nintendo 64. In the search for new software killer apps, it is looking to the fringe, the experimental, and

the **cutting edge**, including:

- *Nights*: the brainchild and 32-bit debut of Yuji "Sonic the Hedgehog" Naka
- *Sonic X-Treme*: the character who defined Genesis returns in 3D
- *Command & Conquer*: one of the PC's best-ever realtime strategy games
- *Heart of Darkness*: the French animation tour de force
- *Bomberman*: a brand new version of the world's best multiplayer game

Is this scramble for disparate content a sign of **desperation?** Perhaps.

Is it **good news** for gamers? **Unquestionably**. Competition breeds innovation, and Sega's risk

could very well be gamers' gain. That is, if the finished titles live up to expectations...

NEXT GENERATION

July 1996

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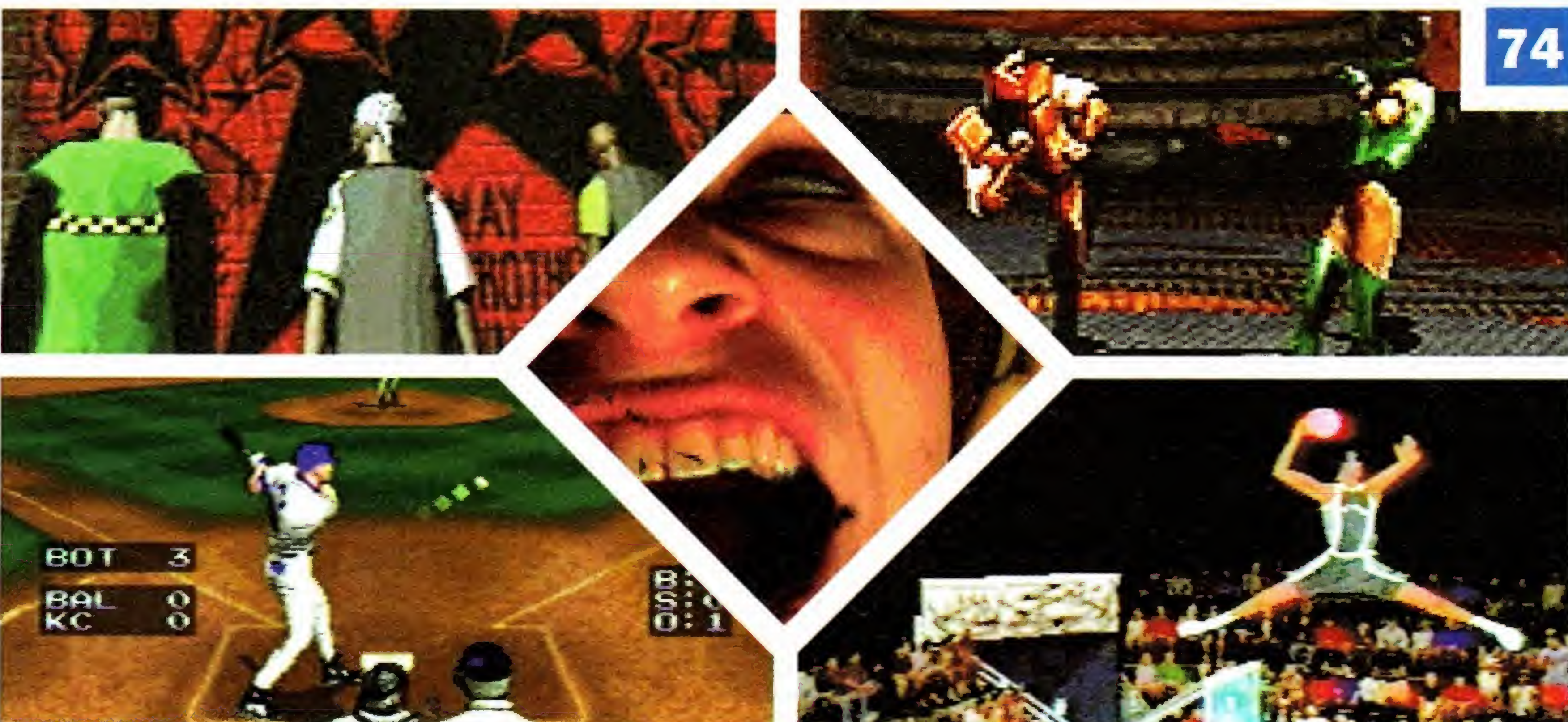
What's the future of online gaming?

Brian Moriarty has deigned everything from ground-breaking text adventures to FMV rail shooters. Now at MPath, he's set his sites on the future of online gaming. His vision is a complete virtual world without 3D graphics. How will it work? See page 6



Getting connected

There's nothing better than a one-player game — except a multiplayer game. And if eight players over a LAN sounds good, how about 1,000 players over the Internet? A **Next Generation** report on the past, present, and future of online gaming



Finals: 30 games reviewed

Featuring *Bottom of the Ninth*, *Shellshock* (PS-X) • *Congo*, *Wipeout* (Saturn) • *Tetris 3D*, *Nester's Funky Bowling* (Virtual Boy), *Civilization 2*, *Terra Nova* (PC) • *Grand Slam!* *Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run* (Super NES) • *Batman Forever*, *Tokyo Wars* (Arcade) • plus 19 more



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News

Check out our revamped news section, with reports on: Who really owns SegaSoft? • Virtuality and Takara sign VR deal • Sony looks to sell Psygnosis • And, how much soda was drunk at E?



Alphas

Six pages on *Nights*, including an exclusive interview with designer Yuji Naka • In-depth looks at Sony's *Crash Bandicoot* • A company profile on Konami • Plus eight more intriguing previews

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The future of online gaming

MPath's head of game design, Brian Moriarty (*Trinity*, *Lodestar*), waxes eloquent on online gaming's future

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News

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Getting connected

There are a wealth of online gaming services coming. What are they? And when can you start playing?

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Alphas

Previewed here are games in development from around the world, featuring: Yuji Naka's *Nights*, *Sonic X-Treme*, *E.O.* (Saturn); *Rave Racer*, *Quake* (PC); *Crash Bandicoot*, *Bubsy 3D*, *Sirens*, *Kowloon's Gate* (PlayStation); Konami corporate profile, and more

74 rating

Finals

We play the worst games in the world. We also play the best. We play them all, in fact, and then rate them for your perusal. This month, we cover 30 games, including: *NBA Live '96*, *PO'ed*, *Worms* (PlayStation); *Ghen War*, *Ultimate MK3* (Saturn); *Golf*, *Wario Land* (Virtual Boy); *Big Red Racing*, *Deep Space 9* (PC); *Art of Fighting 3*, *Magical Drop II* (Neo-Geo); *Super Major League*, *NBA Jam Extreme* (Arcade)

96 now hiring

It's a lot like getting paid to play games. In fact, it IS getting paid to play games, and make them, too

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Letters

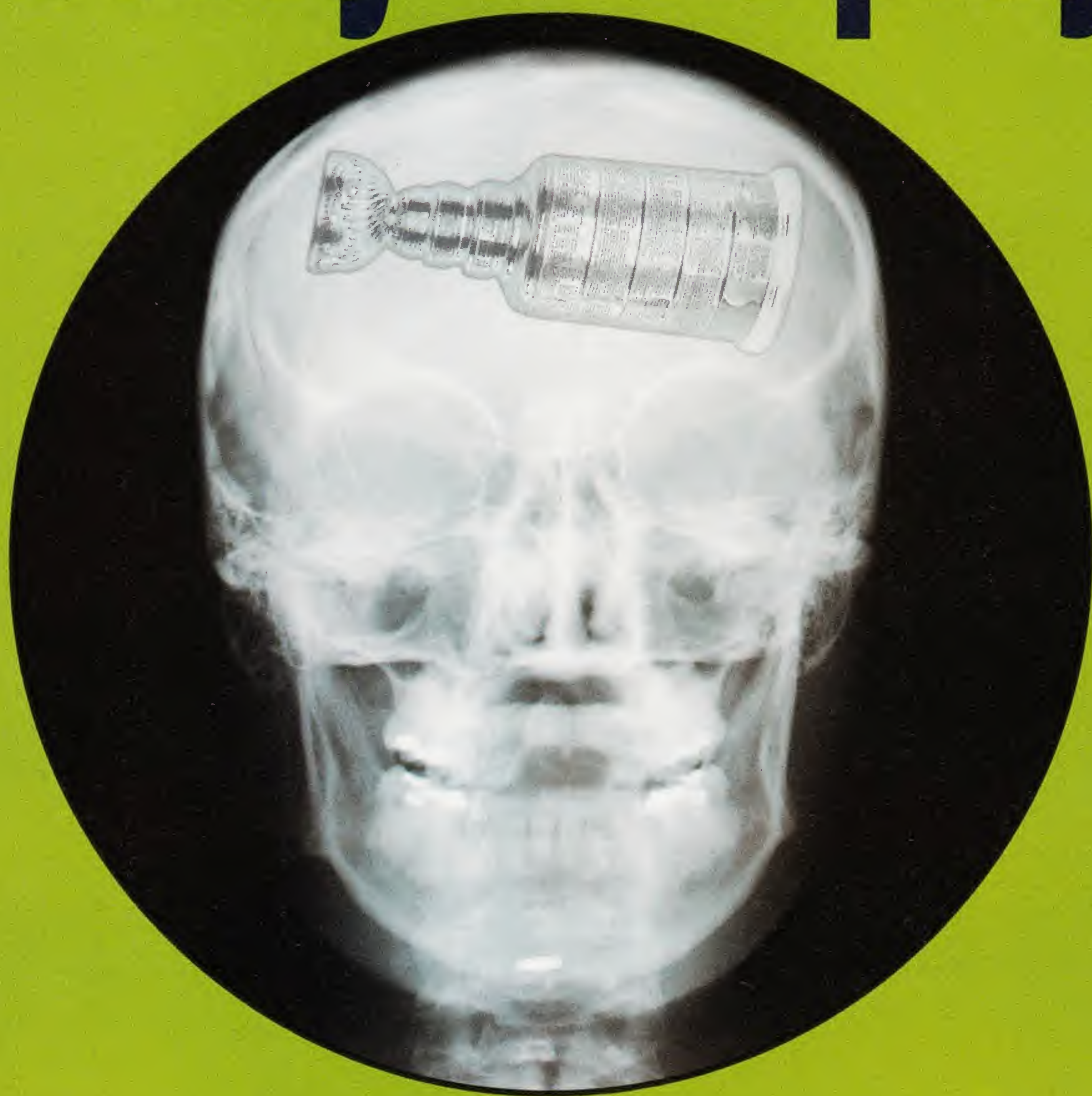
Lets get ready to rumble! Sony's VP responds to our PlayStation coverage, plus the usual haranguing

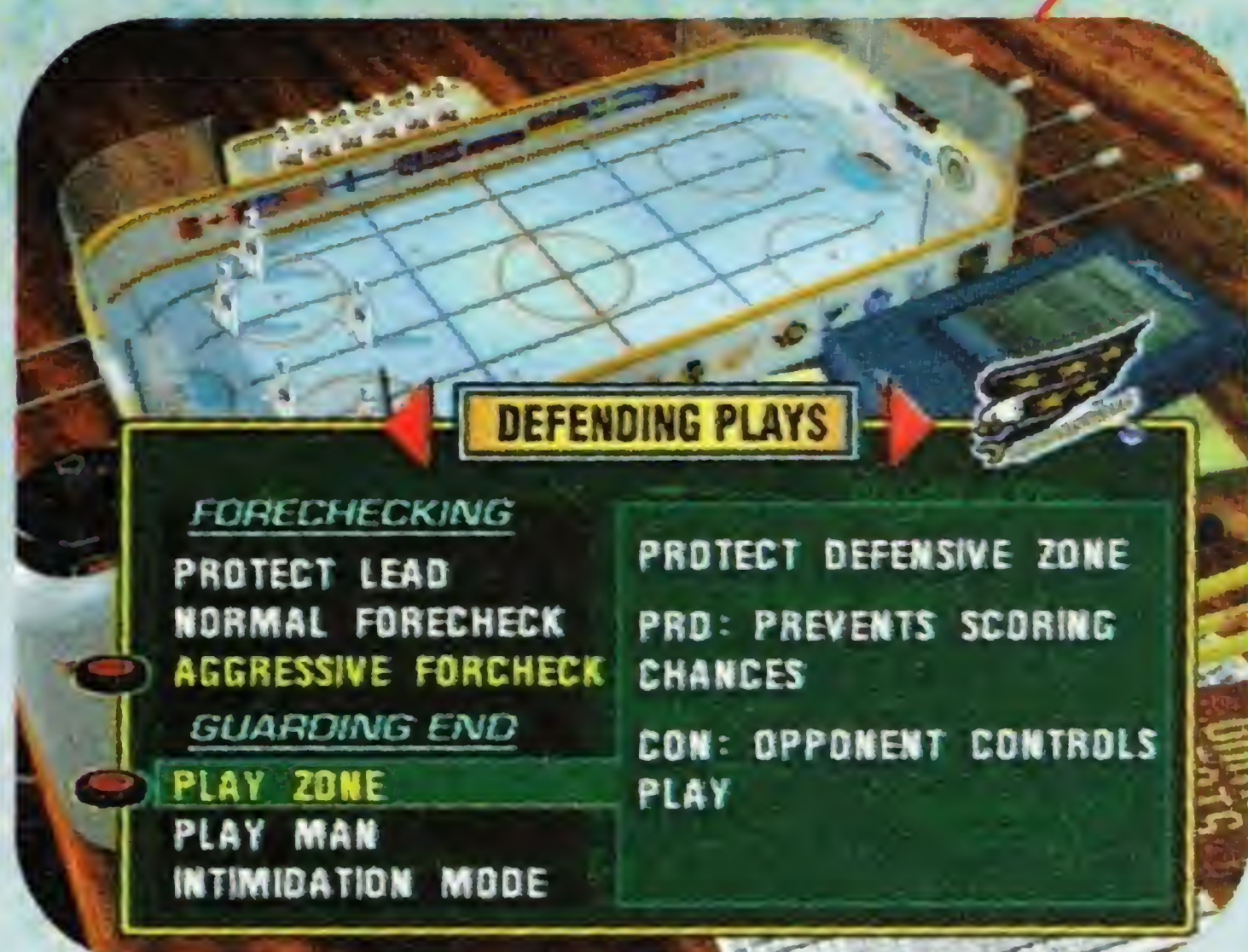
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Next month...

Next Generation #20, with all the skinny on Nintendo 64's latest developments, and the scoop on the Electronic Entertainment Expo, will arrive on newsstands across the earth on July 23

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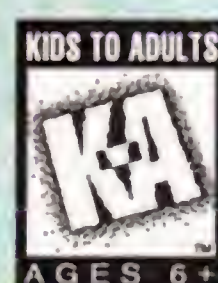


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It's like a gold rush. Desperate for new profits, game companies are scrambling to bring online, multiplayer games to your PC or game console. But what are the technological limitations? What are the hidden goals? Time to ask MPath's Brian Moriarty...

What's the of future online gaming?



Brian Moriarty has already earned his status as one of the industry's most famous and respected game designers. Having started his career at Infocom, Moriarty was responsible for some of the best text adventures ever created. He subsequently designed at LucasArts and Rocket Science. Now he finds himself as the head of game design at MPath, one of the many companies seeking to strike it rich by launching an online, multiplayer gaming service later this year.

Next Generation met with Moriarty to discuss the possibilities and limitations of online,


multiplayer gaming. Always a character, Moriarty once again surprised us with the depth and intensity of his vision...

The online gold rush

NG: So why join MPath?

Brian: They had figured out that it was possible to make the Internet perform realtime games.

Now, anyone who's using the Internet would think this is a pretty silly thing because everyone knows the Internet sucks, it's really slow, and yet the requirements of a realtime action game are quite stringent. Basically, for most of today's

A photograph of a person wearing a blue denim shirt, with their right arm raised and hand open, fingers slightly curled. The background is a warm, yellowish-brown wall.

“I go to the beginner’s level of GEnie’s *CyberStrike*. Well, there are teenagers in there waiting for me. I don’t know how they get in — they are certainly not beginners — and I don’t last 15 seconds!”

Photography: Mark Kochler

realtime action games to work, you have to have a frequency of interaction down to around 6 to 8 cycles per second. And that means minimum latencies [the time it takes for a signal of information to be sent from the gamer, to the game server, and then back again] of less than 200 milliseconds [0.2 seconds] which is very difficult to achieve — and some would say impossible.

But it turns out it isn’t impossible. The reason that the Internet seems to work so badly most of the time is that it’s a “network of networks.” It was designed initially as a means of communicating information around in a way that

would be not be vulnerable to attack from nuclear weaponry. So, for example, if one city went out, the system would be smart enough to know to route around it. And so, consequently, the specific route that information takes on the Internet is not predictable. So, if I’m sending e-mail to you, and you were to reply back, the two documents are almost certainly not going to take the same route.

And yet, knowing where your signals are is key to getting lower latency. So how do you control those pathways? Well, you have to control the network itself. And so what MPath has done is team up with a particular Internet service

talking

"The Internet was designed initially as a means of communicating information around in a way that would be not be vulnerable to attack from nuclear weaponry"

provider called PSINet, out of Virginia, which has wired its entire network coast-to-coast with a ATM digital switch network. Essentially, this then gives us a dial-up network inside the Internet, so we can guarantee the traffic [of game signals], make packets [of information] take precise routes, and give them priority over other packets.

This, then, helps us reduce latency.

NG: And this works in practice?

Brian: You can play fast-action games like *Terminal Velocity* over the Internet with eight players with latencies of well under 200 milliseconds. And, in some cases, as low as 120.

You can expect *Doom*-style games with up to like 30 or 32 players. We're doing this now.

NG: So are multiplayer, online versions of all types of games possible?

Brian: No. There are certain kinds of very fast-action games — fighting games, for example — which I just don't think are possible given the current technology.

As a general rule, you can say that a game featuring a Harrier Jump Jet is not as good an idea as one featuring, say, a Boeing 747. You have to design for the medium.

NG: Have you finalized the pricing strategy for MPath's service?

Brian: No, we have not. It's probably the most delicate and complicated question we have to face. Of course, we hope that players will eventually play for free — because they're looking at all this advertising. But until we get 100,000 players (or whatever the magic number is that attracts advertisers) then players will have to pay.

NG: But you're confident that this will turn out to be big business.

Brian: Anyone who's played multiplayer games knows they're way, way, way more fun than single-player games. Anybody can tell you that. And if

we can find a way to make ordinary people — not just game hobbyists — but ordinary people, come in and be able to play multiplayer experiences, we're going to be rich.

Talk, talk, talk, talk

NG: So you're saying it could be online gaming that finally draws in the "silent majority" of the population that standard computer games have never been able to reach?

Brian: Yes. The truth is that people love to communicate. People just love to get together and talk, and a lot of multiplayer games are just going to be an excuse for people to get together.

Let's use a great example. Remember the board game Trivial Pursuit from a few years ago? It was a very big hit. But Trivial Pursuit is nothing more than an excuse for people to get together and talk. That's all it is. I mean, it's not much of a game, really. And it's not really a way to test people's knowledge because it's got a nice mechanism in it [the need to be lucky with a die] to randomize things so that the smartest players don't always win.

So it's really just an excuse to get together.

NG: There are two big differences, though, between playing Trivial Pursuit and playing on an online game network. First, players of Trivial Pursuit are actually in the same room, able to look each other in the eye and even touch if they want to. Second, they already know each other and are presumably good friends.

Both these provide a base for social interaction that blasting some stranger called Klingon1254 from Michigan can't give.

Brian: I agree completely. We can't expect mass-market people to say go and play, say, *Doom* — they just won't do it.

But they might play *You Don't Know Jack* [a comedy/trivia-based game from Berkeley Systems]. Especially if, instead of just typing to a name, you can just simply talk and listen. And on MPlayer you can do this from day one — it's completely voice-enabled. You can talk to people during games and during the chat before and afterward. Eventually we're going to add little pictures you can upload. Eventually these will be moving pictures. And when bandwidth isn't a problem anymore, there'll be live video.

But in the meanwhile, we think that the voice thing will help to make it real for more people.

NG: What about the problem of not really knowing the people who you're playing against? If you don't know the person who you're playing, you might as well be simply playing a computer?

Brian: Interesting question — I have two responses. First, you'll immediately be able to tell that your opponent is a human being — their play is going to be believable.

Second, you may not know him when you first meet him, but you can get to know him — if



Moriarty is still perhaps best known for his work at Infocom, at the dawn of computer games. *Trinity* — a game based on the development of the atom bomb — is still regarded as a classic

only by the way he screams when you kill him.

This is not just a game-matching service, this is a people-matching service. So people might come into this thing thinking they're coming in to play games, but what they're really doing is meeting people. We actually expect that the chat rooms are going to be even busier than the game rooms, because chat is so wonderful.



A hidden agenda?

NG: But people have a hard enough time communicating in real life! If the human race finds it difficult communicating with loved ones, face-to-face, why all of a sudden is meaningful contact going to be any easier, hundreds of miles apart?

Brian: And the answer to that is that you have hobbies and interests, everybody does. Online, you have a way to find other people who like what you like. I, for example, belong to several mailing lists. One of them is the Jefferson Airplane mailing list. I like the Jefferson Airplane, they're one of my favorite bands, and guess what? There are hundreds of other people in the world who like Jefferson Airplane just as much or more than I do.

NG: It seems that you, personally, view MPlayer as a Trojan Horse — a means of smuggling technology into people's homes with a view to facilitating richer forms of communication at a later date.

Brian: This is very much a Trojan Horse, yes. The real reason I'm doing this is because I think it's real important for people to get together in this way.

Like when France is doing nuclear tests, it's important for me to know that the people of France really didn't like it. Because we didn't get that perspective in our press, but it turns out that they really hated that stuff and it was just their leaders who were doing it. It would be good for me to know that.

NG: So what games have you designed to make this vision a reality?

Brian: I'm working on "a MUD game for the rest of us." It is based on a mythology that everybody knows about, and one which is designed to be very gentle to people who just want to come in and

chat. Sure, if you want to go out and beat up things or kill things, then you can. But you don't have to.

NG: How do you cater for newcomers who aren't going to know what to do, but yet have to thrive in an environment which is filled with potentially dangerous experts?

Brian: When newcomers come in looking around going, "Now what do I do?" the game makes it so that people who have been there a while are very strongly motivated to help the newcomers out.

NG: That's a neat solution, because having ill-matched players forced together is potentially a huge problem.



Brian: Absolutely. Have you ever played CyberStrike on Genie? Supposing I decide to check it out and log on for the first time. I go to the beginner's level because I don't really know what I'm doing. Well, there are teenagers in there waiting for me. I don't know how they get in — they are certainly not beginners — and I don't last 15 seconds.

"There's one!" I can imagine them yelling.

The result? I don't play CyberStrike. The game is not well-designed.

It's getting crowded in here

NG: What's the maximum number of people who you feel could any one game at any time? At what point does it become unmanageable — or simply not much fun? Could a game with, say, 50,000 players work?

Brian: You couldn't have 50,000 people all on the same room. I mean, how would you tell each of the people apart? How would you even know who's there? It would take you five minutes to scroll through the list of names.

But there are other things you can do. If you want a game with 50,000 people, then you design a kind of game where people can be in zones of influence, of controlled size. Players then move

"You may not know your opponent when you first meet him, but you can get to know him — if only by the way he screams when you kill him"

talking

"When thinking people in our society look at games like *Doom*, what do they think? They see how little it looks like real life! The fact is, *Doom* looks like shit"

from zone to zone — for example, you could have rooms in a dungeon.

NG: What's the maximum number of people interacting at any one time?

Brian: More than eight people gets unwieldy, with too much noise. Imagine trying to have a conversation with eight people. It's not easy, even in a real room.

But even if this game of 50,000 limited the close interaction to eight people, the other people are still all out there. You can sense them, and in some sense communicate with them and share experiences. But the level of sharing of experience is stratified depending on how far away you are from them, either in distance, or in time, or in some other game-related dimension.

That's me in the spotlight

NG: Another problem concerning game size is that in a game of 50,000 players, how do you give each individual a meaningful role?

Brian: The question is, how do you make everyone the star?

NG: Gamers have kind of got used to playing the hero, for sure. Does everyone have to be a star?

Brian: Everyone has to have a good enough time so they'd be willing to pay for the service. So, in a sense, everyone has to be a star.

Everyone has to feel like they got their money's worth. And they must feel that if they didn't do well, then they'll "do better the next time." That's the key — the illusion of "winnability." You have to feel like, "Gee, it wasn't really the system's fault, it was my own fault. If I'd just remembered to look at my radar..."

NG: How do you deal with the problem of not everyone in the 50,000 wanting to start and stop at the same time? Surely the game has to be

playing 24 hours a day, with people opting in and out whenever they want?

Brian: Yeah, the game begins when you turn on the server and ends when lightning hits the server.

NG: So it's less of a game, as we know it today, and more of an alternative world.

Brian: It's a place.

NG: And a place can be defined by the rules that govern it, right?

Brian: You can say that, yes.

But is it art?

NG: So if you have created a world, filled with real people, you — as creator — get to deal with moral, social, and even political problems. Why haven't games raised these issues before?

Brian: What you're asking is why aren't games more important? That's the real question. Why are they a cultural slum?

Games are very much in the state of existence that movies were in until 1915. Until 1915, movies were viewed as a very low form of entertainment, a cheap substitute for real life entertainment like theater.

This is the way real artists look at computer games today. When thinking people in our society look at games like *Doom*, what do they think? Do you think they're going to get attracted to the medium when they see that? They look at *Doom* and they see how little it looks like real life! The fact is, *Doom* looks like shit.

So, what do we need? What we need is a D.W. Griffith. He was a legitimate theater actor who, back at the dawn of movies, saw potential in the medium. In the days when a typical film would last 20 minutes and would cost about \$10,000 to make, he went out and spent \$200,000 on a three-hour movie called *Birth of a Nation*.

It completely changed what the motion picture meant. He made a movie that was so important to see, that people who would never normally be caught dead at the movie theater were crowding the streets to see it. And it just completely changed people's view of what the movies were. It was like, "This could be a medium where important things can happen," or "This is a medium that can stir emotion." Well, guess what? The same is true of the computer game medium, but you wouldn't know by looking at it, would you?

Here we have the interactive medium, which, — unlike every other medium that comes before it — is one in which you can make a point to people by actually making them go through something. You can put people at the lever of the controls of a gas chamber, or in the shoes of an abortion doctor.

There's no other medium that can do this. So what an opportunity! But instead, we just do more *Doom*. We need someone to come into this medium to look at it clearly and see opportunity, instead of just seeing more *Doom*.

And that's what I'm trying to do.

ng



Can Brian Moriarty fulfill his dream — with online, multiplayer gaming — of doing for the game industry what D.W. Griffith did for the movie industry? MPath certainly hopes so

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Sega versus Sony?: SegaSoft to publish games on PlayStation/**Crib Sheet:** A quick guide to everything gamers should know/**p.14** • **Nintendo's handheld revealed:** "Atlantis" to feature ARM chip/**Gadget:** new hardware reviews/**p.16** • **In the Studio:** Games in development/**p.20** • **VR:** Takara and Virtuality team up/**Stop Press:** Last minute news/**p.24**



The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth

Sega to publish games on PlayStation

Yes, it's true. So are these panic measures? Or simply Sega's extended family covering all the gaming bases?

"[SegaSoft is] independent from Sega. We have other partners and we have an independent board."

Joe Miller, executive vp, SegaSoft

In early May 1996, Sega revealed that a new company called SegaSoft intended to publish computer and videogames "on all platforms." Immediately, anxious Saturn owners demanded to know if "all platforms" included Sony's PlayStation. Sega acknowledged that it did, which begged questions concerning SegaSoft's relationship to Sega of America (the division responsible for Saturn), and — subsequently — Sega's commitment to Saturn.

Investigation soon revealed that SegaSoft was "an independent U.S. incorporated software development company," and "a joint venture of CSK Corporation [owning

60%] and Sega of America [owning 40%]." Seemingly all Sega divisions were keen to blunt the damaging notion that Sega was transferring support from its own Saturn platform to PlayStation, and instead promoted the idea of a healthy distance between SegaSoft and Sega of America. They



were presented as two independent companies — the former "dedicated to creating the very best interactive

software and content for delivery on all platforms," the latter remaining firmly committed to Saturn.

In an exclusive interview with *Next Generation Online*, SegaSoft's Executive Vice President Joe Miller responded to Saturn owners' worries. "It's really not that strange," Miller argued. "Although there has been some confusion about SegaSoft. We are independent from Sega, and the best way that this manifests itself is indeed the fact that we are publishing for multiple platforms. Sega has a 40% equity in us, but we have other partners and we have an independent board." In other words, Miller was maintaining that the two companies were essentially separate, with different agendas — and that SegaSoft's publishing for PlayStation didn't mean that Sega's support for Saturn was weakening.

However, closer investigation soon revealed that there was more to CSK (the owners of 60% of SegaSoft) than perhaps Sega wanted gamers to hear. The fact is that Sega of America is a wholly owned subsidiary of Sega

Divorce for Sony and Psygnosis

An interesting footnote to the SegaSoft story is the news that Sony is looking to sell Psygnosis, with investment bankers SBC Warburg helping find a buyer. Ted Kawai, SCA's deputy president, conceded that Psygnosis' strengths as "a multi-platform publisher" was central to the decision.

Sony originally purchased the U.K.-based game developer to help PlayStation's launch. It is rumored, however, that a loophole in Psygnosis' contact enabled the company to continue support for Saturn, which caused irrevocable friction between the two.



Mr. Hayao Nakayama, CEO of Sega Enterprises (upper left). Mr. Isao Okawa, president and chairman of CSK Corp., and Chairman of Sega Enterprises (upper right), and SegaSoft's Executive Vice President Joe Miller (above)



Sega-branded games for PlayStation? Better get used to the idea...

Crib sheet

Stuff every gamer should know. This month, gaming's most charismatic visionary:

No. 1 Trip Hawkins

Who is he? Trip is the president and CEO of The 3DO Company, based in Redwood City, CA. He founded the company in 1992.

But he was a big deal before that, right?

Right. In 1982 he founded Electronic Arts, and led it to its position of world's number one entertainment software publisher.

So he's clever then.

Oh yes.

But didn't 3DO fail?

When you say "3DO", we assume you mean the 32-bit videogame platform, and not The 3DO Company — which is very much alive and kicking.

Um, yes. Don't worry, the two are often confused. The 3DO Company developed a 32-bit videogame platform dubbed "The 3DO Multiplayer."

Unfortunately for Trip, it never really took off.

Why not? The systems cost too much and there was never a software "killer app."

Also, Trip now claims that 32-bit doesn't offer a big enough leap over 16-bit and that the real next big thing is 64-bit (which, incidentally, is what Trip's now selling).

Ah yes, the fabled M2. Indeed. The 3DO Company recently licensed the M2 technology to Matsushita for \$100 million (plus ongoing royalties). Matsushita plans to use the technology in a 64-bit videogame system.

Will it be any good? Too early to tell.

Enterprises Ltd, a company which — and here's the cruncher — was "acquired by CSK in April 1984" (according to CSK's own literature). As of today (the company having been listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in April of 1988), "CSK [remains] a majority shareholder of Sega Enterprises, Ltd.," according to Sega of America's own WWW site. The fact is, they're essentially the same company. CSK and Sega Enterprises Ltd. even share the same chairman, one Mr. Isao Okawa.

So what does this mean?

It means that no matter how you chose to divide it up (and with Sega Enterprises, Sega of America, SegaSoft, Sega GameWorks, and Sega Entertainment, all claiming to stand as disparate entities, there's certainly been a lot of dividing), this is all one big family of companies — with hardly any outside blood at all. The family trees of all "Sega" branded companies eventually lead back to CSK, and this means that in Redwood City, CA, two corporate siblings are apparently trying to tug their parent in different directions. One claims to be solely behind its own Saturn system, the other claims that nepotism has no place in business.

On the surface, this certainly seems ludicrous. And conspiracy theorists will certainly get off on all this. But one must be careful not to read too much into the two companies' apparent incongruity: any large corporate structure is bound to occasionally feature what may be perceived as a conflict of interest (Sony manufactures sound chips for Nintendo, for example). Indeed, CSK is acting in a classic Japanese style, investing in everything under the sun (even seemingly contradictory plays) in the hope of a few winners.

But that's not to say that Sega's restructuring is insignificant. The truth is that while SegaSoft may pose no immediate threat to Saturn ("None of Saturn's main exclusive games will appear on PlayStation, and that

certainly means all of the AM games," maintains a Sega spokesperson), it must be viewed as a potential lifeboat for Sega, in preparation for the possibility of Saturn's ship sinking.

With 150 staff (mostly all transferred from Sega of America) and expectations of \$100 million revenue in its first fiscal year, SegaSoft is no nickel-and-dime organization. It also shares distribution, sales, marketing, and PR services (as well as many mutually beneficial business contracts) with Sega of America: the relationship is considerably closer than that of two companies who merely appear on the same Japanese corporation's end-of-year financial reports. They are even located less than five minutes walk from each other.

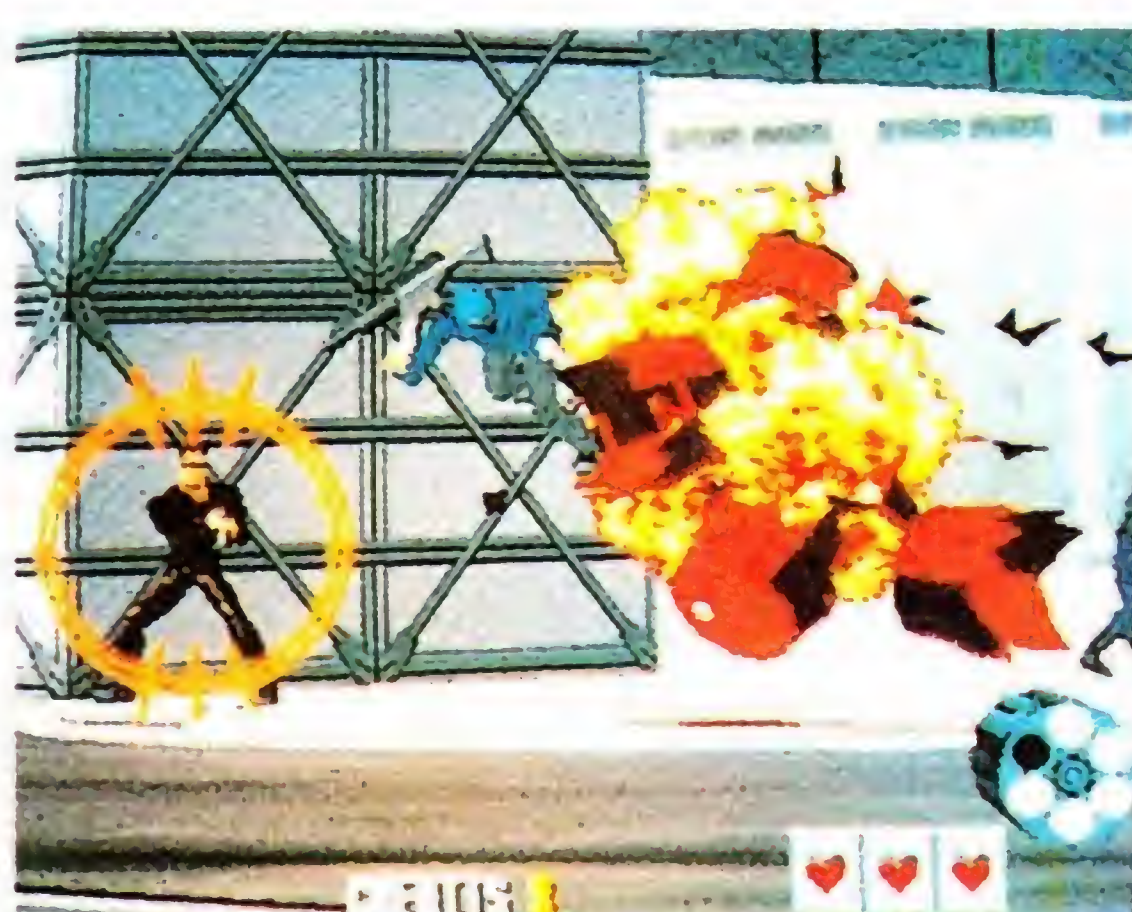
SegaSoft has to be viewed, then, as fulfilling two functions: First, it is CSK Corporation sheltering its Sega operation from the full risk of unilaterally supporting just one hardware platform. By creating and transferring resources to a "new company" now, it will be far better positioned to recover and thrive publishing for multiple platforms if Saturn were to fail. Second, it is a good way of increasing revenues without significantly damaging its Saturn business. In one respect, this news actually bodes well for Saturn owners, as it means that Sega will continue to spend heavily on what it does best — creating great software.

So, in the final analysis, there's no dodging the conclusion that supporting PlayStation, on the one hand, inevitably weakens and dilutes the support of Saturn with the other (the \$64,000 question: does Sega of America really really want gamers to enjoy playing SegaSoft games on PlayStation?). But it can be assumed that Saturn gamers have no real need to start panicking, at least for now. Given Saturn's success in Japan and — to a lesser extent — Europe, the platform will continue to be supported strongly. Sega's just not burning any bridges, that's all.

What is it?

What is this digital entity that brings hard driving daily news, interviews, and downloadable screen-shots and videos of the newest videogames to your computer every day of the year?

Closer investigation revealed that there is more to CSK (the 60% owners of SegaSoft) than perhaps Sega wanted gamers to hear



Sega's highly successful line-up of coin-op conversions will remain exclusive to Saturn, at least for the immediate future

breaking

Nintendo's Atlantis emerges

The 32-bit successor to Game Boy is set to feature a StrongARM CPU

Nintendo®

It is...

Next Generation OnLine, the 24-hours-a-day news and features resource on the World Wide Web. Its address is <http://www.next-generation.com/>. We humbly suggest that you check it out ASAP

Nintendo is committed to Atlantis boasting 30 hours of play time on one set of batteries

Next Generation has learned more about Nintendo's forthcoming "Atlantis" handheld system, which is scheduled to feature a color 2-inch by 3-inch LCD, and be released "in at least one territory" by the end of the year. The handheld will feature a central processing unit from Advanced RISC Machines (ARM), based in Cambridge, U.K. Sources close to **Next Generation** have said that the company's StrongARM110 will be at the heart of Atlantis, having been — according to ARM — specifically designed to feature "the performance of a supercomputer with the power dissipation low enough to run on AA batteries and pricing which is geared toward mass-market, consumer electronics products."

The SA-110 itself is available in 100 MHz, 160 MHz and 200 MHz clock speeds. While it is not yet clear which Atlantis will feature, the smart money is currently on the 160 MHz flavor, which ARM boasts is "the most power-efficient processor available today," outputting 1.65V, 185 Dhrystones, 2.1 MIPS at 400mW. Of course, in a battery-powered device, this power efficiency is crucial, especially if inside sources are correct in leaking that Nintendo is committed to Atlantis boasting 30 hours of play time on one set of batteries.

The 160 MHz chips cost approximately \$49 per unit, when ordered in bulk shipments of 10,000. Given that Game Boy has sold more than 18 million units worldwide, and continues to thrive, this should be affordable. There's no reason why Atlantis, with its 32-bit CPU and a color screen, should flounder. **ng**



The StrongARM chip used in Nintendo's 64-bit handheld is the SA-110. But will Nintendo get it to run for 30 hours on one set of batteries?

GADGET

Peripherals, accessories, gizmos, add-ons, thingies, and stuff

10Xtreme

Price: \$299

Manufacturer: Pinnacle Micro Inc.

System: PC

Tired of those pokey, last-generation 4X CD-ROM drives? How does a 10X drive sound?

Available from Pinnacle Micro, the 10Xtreme is the world's first deca-speed CD-ROM. The drive uses an IDE interface, takes up an internal 5.25", half-height bay, and has its own front-loading tray, so there's no need for separate CD caddies. Unlike some 8X drives which are simply 4X drives with sped-up motors and DSPs, 10Xtreme offers a full 1.5 Mbyte/sec. transfer rate. Due to time constraints, Next Generation was not able to fully benchmark the drive, however, initial subjective impressions are extremely favorable. The drive performed every task it faced faster than anything else we've seen, running full-screen FMV without a hitch, and dropping the access times down to nothing. Of course, the longevity of something spinning that fast is completely unknown. But, if you've got to have the fastest machine on the block, there's no alternative.



Game Shark

Price: \$54.99

Manufacturer: Interact

Systems: Saturn, PlayStation

Although it's been out for a while, the Game Shark is still one of the niftiest peripherals you can get for 32-bit consoles. Available from Interact in different models for PlayStation and Saturn, Game Shark is a cart that plugs into PlayStation's expansion slot or Saturn's memory card slot. Operation is similar to Galoob's venerable

Game Genie, in that the Shark enables the user to enter "cheat" codes before starting the game which give the user anything from infinite lives to a level select. Each version comes preprogrammed with codes for more than 20 games, and additional codes can be obtained either through a subscription to Dangerous Waters, Interact's monthly newsletter, or online at <http://www.gameshark.com/>.



Virtual i.Glasses

Price: \$399 VTV, \$599 VPC

Manufacturer: Virtual i.O

Systems: PlayStation, PC

Virtual i.O of Seattle has a new, lower cost version of its Virtual Television (VTV) glasses. The base model is PlayStation and Saturn "compatible," in that the unit plugs into the standard A/V jacks on the back of PlayStation, or can be connected to the A/V cables of Saturn using female-to-female adaptors. The glasses can be used with any A/V source, including VCRs, laserdisc players, etc. Since NTSC standard uses two separate video fields per frame, the VTV unit can produce a true 3D image by placing a different field over each eye, provided the game itself has been programmed to send stereoscopically separated fields. However, at press time no console games have been released that can take advantage of this. The PC-compatible version also offers a head-tracking unit and all the necessary cables and connectors for use with PC, and is supported by a number of titles, including *MechWarrior II* and *Descent II*.



STOP press

Last minute news...

Is Sony playing fair?

The Japanese Fair Trade Commission is investigating claims that Sony threatened to withhold product from retailers selling PlayStation software below Sony's suggest cost. Sony says it is cooperating with investigators.

Ashes to ashes...

The 10K form released by Atari's board of directors to disappointed stockholders concedes what everyone already knew, that the Jaguar is totally dead, that Atari has known it was dead for months, and that liquidation of stock has been their only concern in previous months. The fat lady's song was pretty good, wasn't it?

The name game

Spectrum Holobyte, the ailing PC software house, will stop using its name in marketing software. Instead, all future releases will be under the MicroProse brand, which has better recognition.

Id Software gets nasty

Buyers of Id's forthcoming *Quake* will be able to purchase a cut-down version of the game via normal retail sources for \$10. The rest of the game (which sits on the CD-ROM in encrypted form) can be accessed by calling an 800 number and securing a special code (for a further \$40). Thanks to this policy, Id will only have to share a portion of the \$10 cost with retailers, and keep the \$40. Needless to say, the retailers ain't happy.

What the hell is ISDN, and why should gamers care?

Q uick: what does ISDN stand for?
a) Integrated Services Digital Network; b) I See Dollars Now; c) I Still Don't kNow; d) It Seems Damn Nebulous; e) all of the above

If you guessed (e), step up and claim your prize. Integrated Services Digital Network is officially known as ISDN, and what it means is digital communications. Analog phone lines are quite good at what they were designed for — voice communications. But plain, old telephone service (POTS) just can't cut it when it comes to data transfer.

Modems that throughput 28.8 Kbits per second are cheap now, with a new standard reaching about 31 Kbps. But all analog lines have theoretical maximum data transfer rate (due to their analog nature). Using a modem, the digital signals that all our computers output have to be MODulated and DEModulated (i.e. MoDem), so digital data can be sent on the analog line. And that maximum rate is about 31 Kbps. Line conditions mean you rarely get a consistent data throughput at 28.8 Kbps, much less 31 Kbps; in fact, 19.2 Kbps is about where most connections can reliably negotiate consistently.

Gamers should care because ISDN is completely digital, and can jump start your throughput up to a reliable 128 Kbps — online gaming here you come. Also, the World Wide Web may be the first killer app that makes ISDN useful. All those graphics and audio can clog even the fastest analog modems. Who wants to wait while more graphics download? And Virtual Reality Markup Language (VRML), capable of creating 3D worlds in cyberspace, can't run acceptably under analog speeds. In fact, the Web won't run well under analog speeds. ISDN will give us faster access times for now.

The rush to put gaming content online has begun in earnest. Imagine 3D worlds, like the one depicted in Neal Stephenson's *Snowcrash*, where you can connect thousands of would-be heroes and villains. Now, how is all this data going to be transmitted if your modem connection seems like it can barely handle AOL's *Neverwinter Nights*? At least one of the soon-to-be opened online gaming services say that ISDN figures widely into the success of online gaming.

It's my job to keep abreast of the next generation of cyberspace, so I took a deep breath and called NYNEX to convert my second voice line devoted to my FAX and modem to an ISDN line. Let

this be a cautionary tale to those of you who may be considering a similar move:

"Sure, no problem," they said. But to paraphrase *Maus* creator Art Spiegelman, it was here that my troubles began. First, there was the issue of cost: \$14/month, plus \$.01 per minute per B channel. ISDN is broken up into two channels, each with a maximum 64 K bps; together, two B channels can be bonded to reach a maximum 128 K bps. Two cents a minute, before phone company charges, is steep considering how much time I spend online, I thought, but I had a solution: get a Motorola BitSURFR Pro ISDN box.

I got BitSURFR Pro, which has an integrated POTS converter, meaning my old analog devices can plug into the BitSURFR Pro and use the digital line like an analog line, without any extra cost. I would use the ISDN 128 K bps access for real Web surfing only. Wait, did I say 128 K? Guess again. A PC serial port using a 16550 UART maxes out at 115 K bps, 57 K bps per B channel. New serial port designs rev faster, but they aren't here yet; an internal ISDN adapter would reach 128 K without problems, but most internal ISA ISDN cards don't have the features of the BitSURFR Pro. So it sat there, ready for when my data line would be converted to ISDN.

But when I came home one day, the data line went dead. Did I forget to pay my bill? Nope. Turns out they began my line conversion weeks ahead of schedule without informing me, and I wasn't ready for the change...

To make a long story short, it's taken months for NYNEX to get my system up and running, and that included teams of technicians and a firmware revision for my Motorola box. The good news is that ISDN is fast. Really fast. You'll be able to blaze through downloads at impressive speeds, and have realtime conversations (not just type-chat) which online gaming services, like Mpath, are planning. And keep an eye out for major services. Few have it now (and only on a test basis in limited locations), but they will. Two Internet providers, DTI and Interramp have ISDN access today.

If you want to investigate ISDN, check with your phone company. Some, like Bell Atlantic, are planning to introduce all-you-can-eat plans for certain hours of usage. And if you can stand the pain on the cutting edge, you'll have a front seat for the next generation of online games and game services.

Gaming on the Internet: Past, Present, and Future



by Bernard Yee

Bernard Yee has contributed to USA Today and writes regularly for PC Gamer, PC Magazine, and has authored several books on gaming



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Atari

All the latest arcade and coin-op news



Sega's Big Plans

Sega GameWorks is capitalized to the tune of \$200 million. Japan-based Sega Ltd. put up 46% of the funds, with 27% each coming from DreamWorks SKG and MCA-Universal, the two American partners in the joint venture. Sega GameWorks hopes to reach 100 sites in five years. For fiscal 1996, it projects to earn \$120 million from coin-op sales and \$25 million from arcade operations.

Killer Instinct II Update

According to Internet chatter by players, Midway's *Killer Instinct II* is "too easy" in one-player mode and too difficult in two-player mode. Midway says it's testing an update chip for the game to smooth out the challenge level of gameplay in each mode, but at press time the company was a bit shy about formally announcing plans to release the chip — which it said could cost the factory a pretty penny.

Home Run Derby: Virtual Reality Baseball

One of the real eye-catchers at a recent coin-op trade show was *Home Run Derby*, created by CA-based Interactive Light. It's a "virtual reality batting cage" where an oversize video screen shows computer animation of a pitcher throwing fastballs, sliders, change-ups, curve balls, etc., then you swing a real bat (which is covered with reflective tape so it nearly resembles a lightsaber from *Star Wars*).

Advanced optical sensors measure many aspects of your swing (speed, direction, tilt, pitch, etc.) and a clever software program figures out how you "would have hit" the virtual ball.

Interactive Light may be new to the scene, but a respected New York factory called Innovative Concepts in Entertainment (I.C.E.) has just licensed the game. Look for it FECs, theme parks, and larger arcades this summer.

More Coin-op Websites

By now, plenty of other arcade industry members have created their own Web pages. Listed below is a partial list of World Wide Web addresses.

AMOA, a trade association for owner-operators of videogames and other amusement machines, is at <http://www.amoa.com>. Their sister association AAMA, representing game manufacturers and distributors, is located at <http://www.coin-op.org>. The family entertainment center association (IAFEC) may be found at <http://www.funone.com/assoc/iafec.htm>. IAPPA (International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions, the theme park trade group) is found at <http://www.iaapa.org>. In addition to Randy Fromm's service (which includes a window on coin-op trade magazines like *Cash Box International*), a few arcade industry journals have set up their own dedicated Web sites. Among them is my own *RePlay Magazine* at <http://www.replaymag.com> — although at press time, our page isn't much more than a subscription form. AB Europe runs an ambitious interactive service which is sponsored by Namco Europe; this is a first and the jury is still out on the sponsorship idea. Decide for yourself at <http://www.ab-europe.co.uk/abe>.

Arcade factories, of course, are busy with their own Web sites, most of which are aimed directly at players with all kinds of promotions, game info background, sound bites, still and moving graphics, new game teasers, chat rooms, hints for better gameplay prowess, and even contests, tournaments, promotions and arcade-related merchandise.

Factory addresses include Capcom at:

<http://capcom.ms>, www.wa.com; SNK Corp. of America at <http://www.neogeo-usa.com>; at press time Atari is at <http://pathfinder.com/twi/area51>. Williams/Bally-Midway runs its site at <http://www.wms.com>. Sega GameWorks is found at <http://www.segaoa.com>; and Konami America is at <http://www.konami.com>.

If you're into the more esoteric aspects of the arcade world, you can check out Web sites run by arcade owners and their suppliers. America's biggest distribution chain, Betson Enterprises, runs a Web site at <http://www.betson.com>. A large NY-based arcade operator, Amusement Consultants, has a site at <http://www.amusementconsult.com>. Finally, if you want to eavesdrop on arcade owners as they swap notes on the popularity of new arcade videos, log onto <http://www.magicnet/~allens/insert.htm>.

Then, of course, for daily news updates and reviews there's always *Next Generation Online* at <http://www.next-generation.com/>.



Up-and-Coming Coin-ops



Run and Gun II — Konami

The original *Run and Gun* was the genesis for all of today's offensive, in-your-face basketball titles. This sequel remains one of the few,

if not the only, arcade-style, five-on-five basketball game in which gamers can play any of the five players. Faster play and smoother, better looking graphics, plus the title's original solid gameplay are sure to make this a hit once again.

Alpine Surfer — Namco

The sister to *Alpine Racer* (the cool one-player phenomenon that brought Namco several arcade industry awards), *Alpine Surfer* is a snowboarding simulator teeming with fast-action downhill, erm, "shredding."



Gun Blade NY — Sega

An airborne *Virtua Cop*, *Gun Blade NY* is the uzi-lover's dream with its nonstop machine gun fire (no reloading), swooping ariel angles, and clever, duck-and-

diving artificial intelligence. Early tests have proven tremendous for this no-brainer shoot-'em-up, and though its distribution is limited, it's a looker.

by Marcus Webb

Marcus Webb is the editor-in-chief of *RePlay* magazine, the US' leading trade amusement magazine



DEATH. It's what they live for.



Against a dark and shifting 3-D landscape, the warriors of the twisted underworld known as BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN 2™ await your return. How do they know you'll be back? Let's just say it's a gut feeling. As in the first 360° go-round, the moves are lethal, the stages visceral and the characters, wicked. And this time, the original avengers are joined by a new crew of fighters. Like Tracy, the sexy cop gone bad; Gaia, merciless madman; and Chaos, a friendly fella who happens to swing a sickle. All of 'em real keen to get to know you better. On every level.

So welcome back. And plan to stay awhile. Because here in Battle Arena Toshinden 2, these forsaken foes aren't just out to take you down. They're down to take you out.



<http://www.playmatestoy.com>



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PIE is a trademark of Playmates Interactive Entertainment.

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breaking

Sega's low-cost Saturn unveiled

Sega's retooled Saturn sports a vastly more efficient design and lower price



Except for the absence of a disk access light, the new Saturn is cosmetically almost identical to the old one

Sales of the Saturn in Japan have been extremely strong up to this point, and have only increased since the introduction of the new white Saturn at the equivalent of \$199 (U.S.) in April. U.S. consumers have seen a more moderate price-drop (to \$249), although a further drop is likely before the winter holiday.

But how have these price cuts been managed? According to Sega, economies of scale in manufacturing have generated most of the savings. We recently looked under the hood of the new Saturn to see for ourselves.

Despite reports to the contrary, the white Saturn is exactly the same size as the previous model, with only a few cosmetic changes. Inside, however, is another story.

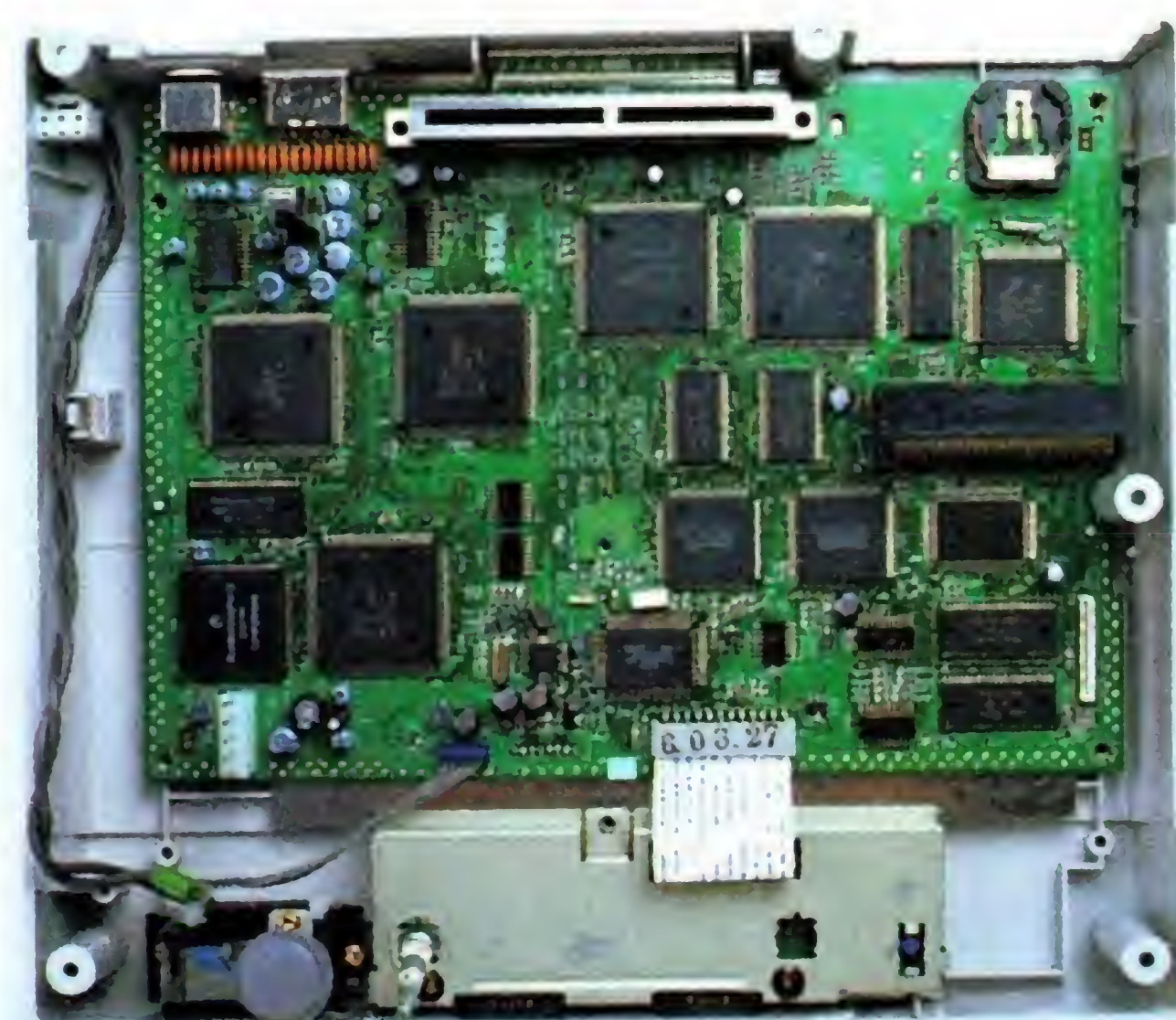
The new motherboard is about 20% smaller than the old one, with a streamlined power supply. The most immediately noticeable change has been the loss of a separate CD-ROM controller on its own daughterboard. The new Saturn has the controller integrated into the main board, instead.

Despite the greater chip density, the new board looks far cleaner than the mess inside the original Sega machine, with far fewer "fix it" circuits on the back, although there's little actual chip integration other than going with two large SIMMs as main memory instead of multiple, smaller SIMMs.

While the black Saturn had several layers of components inside attached to both the top and bottom of the unit, the white Saturn's case has parts only in the lower section, fewer

screws, and an overall more efficient architecture. Indeed, our conclusion is that despite Sega's claims, the savings in the new design are reached by a simpler construction, and not economies of scale.

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Inside, the guts of the new Saturn (top) are far more streamlined than the mess found in the original (above)

In the studio

So who's working on what? What's your favorite development team's latest project? And just what's on time, and what's been delayed? A Next Generation look behind the scenes...

Interplay has confirmed that it will be launching a sequel to the much-loved (and hideously violent) shooter, *Loaded*. Developed by U.K.-based **Gremlin Graphics**, the sequel should be ready for completion in time for a release later this year. Gremlin promises character voices, as well as new weaponry which — we are promised — will increase the amount of bloodshed. New characters have also been included, whilst old favorites have been "revved up."



Meanwhile, **Acclaim** has secured the rights to release three top 3DO games on PlayStation, Saturn and PC. While this has to be regarded as another nail in the coffin for 3DO's 32-bit ambitions (giving away what killer apps it managed to muster ain't the tactics of a system on the rise), it's good news for the rest of us. *Killing Time* is a (you guessed it) *Doom*-type game with a weird, Gothic feel. It originally scored five stars in Next Generation. *Battlesport* is a 3D game in which you must capture a ball and deposit it in a goal while avoiding robot monsters and generally laying waste to said bad guys. It also scored five red stars. *Starfighter* scored only four stars (shame!) and is a 3D air combat action game featuring over 60 missions. The first of these converted games will be appearing this summer.

Fantastic news: a new version of *Populous*, the definitive "God Game," is being developed by Peter Molyneux's **Bullfrog**. Little is known about the project as yet, except that it is scheduled for release in the summer of 1997, and will be published by **Electronic Arts**. Senior developers at Bullfrog are currently working hard to complete RPG *Dungeon Keeper*. Once finished, many will turn to the latest *Populous* game. The *Populous* world enables the player to control subjects and terrain in order to outdo rival deities. The original was a smash-hit in 1990 and helped define a new genre. The third *Populous* will almost certainly be Internet compatible, and will be released for PC and — given Molyneux's leanings — probably PlayStation.



Dinky racing game *Micro Machines* is to be brought to PlayStation and Saturn. This 8-bit and 16-bit classic developed and published by **CodeMasters** was a triumph of gameplay over cosmetics — so let's hope the developers of the 32-bit versions don't try to "get clever" just for the sake of it. The game is an overhead-view racer in which toy cars battle it out against one another across table-tops, workbenches, and even the bathroom.



We started at **Interplay**, so we'll finish there, also. It's no secret that *Bomberman* is one of Next Generation's all time favorite games. Well, we've learned that Interplay has secured the rights from **HudsonSoft** to produce a PC version. This would be reason enough for all gamers to celebrate, but there's more: First, Interplay's Brian Fargo has made no secret of the fact that a custom version of *Bomberman* PC will swiftly make its way to the online service Engage (now there's a killer app if ever there was one). Second, look for a custom Next Generation level, won over a game of pool in Orange County, CA...

JAPAN GIVES SONY STRATEGY CLUE

NEWSLINE: Strategists at Sony Computer Entertainment America are scrutinizing sales of Japan's new PlayStation "Fighting Box" bundle with growing interest. The bundle features a PlayStation, two controllers, and a memory card. It is aimed at potential purchases of *Tekken 2* and retails at \$250.

BOTTOMLINE: Executives here in the U.S. are searching for effective ways to combat the new, cheaper Saturn. At the time of going to press, PlayStation was \$50 more expensive than Saturn. Some view a bundle as a likely solution, given that it adds extra value to the consumer without costing the manufacturer so much in lost revenue. A bundle here featuring a copy of an aging fighting game and two controllers would certainly have market appeal, especially if priced at \$299 — the same as Saturn with one copy of *Virtua Fighter*. Another solution is a \$25 drop with a free memory card. This has its supporters because many PlayStation buyers purchase the memory card on day one, anyway.

Of course, the battles between Sony's Japanese and American divisions over the price of PlayStation are legendary. This could well turn into another battle.

SONY GRABS OCEAN TITLES

NEWSLINE: Sony has snapped up the rights to publish at least two of Ocean's forthcoming PlayStation titles in North America. Both *Tunnel B1* and *Viper* impressed crowds at the recent European Computer Trade Show (ECTS), and evidently impressed buyers at Sony. According to Ocean, both games represented the high point of what many thought a dull exhibition.

BOTTOMLINE: Ocean is perfectly capable of publishing these titles itself. However, Sony (and Sega) have been busy gathering nuts for the forthcoming fall and holiday season when both will want to publish and market the best games under their own name. Once again, expect both companies to use their hot-ticket titles to sell hardware.

EUROPEAN SUPER PUBLISHER EMERGES

NEWSLINE: French game publisher Infogrames has acquired Ocean, one of Britain's leading gaming companies, in a share-swap deal which has effectively created one of the largest publishing forces in the world. The huge deal is valued at about \$100 million. The new super-company will employ more than 500 people.

In a joint statement, the companies said: "We aim to create a European company of sufficient size to develop the interactive software of the future."

BOTTOMLINE: Ten years ago, the European videogame market was splintered with dozens of small concerns operating in their own territories. Since then, the presence and success of large U.S. owned firms such as EA, Acclaim, and Virgin have forced the Europeans to create larger super-companies in order to compete. This deal makes Infogrames the largest publisher in Europe.

RACE SLAMS NINTENDO

NEWSLINE: Spectrum Holobyte chief Steve Race has criticized Nintendo's publishing policy toward its forthcoming 64-bit machine. Spectrum's subsidiary MicroProse, a member of the Nintendo 64's fabled Dream Team, has been working on a new version of *Top Gun* for the past two years.

However, prelaunch jitters are evidently affecting the company. Race, formerly head of Sony Computer Entertainment of America, commented: "There is still no sign of a publisher plan for any licensee, and the machine is supposed to be just five months away from launch. We're already worried about the long lead times and high cost of supporting a cartridge machine. The question is, does Nintendo really think it needs licensees? It seems to want the lion's share of the software sales, possibly as much as two thirds."

BOTTOMLINE: Game publisher frustration at Nintendo has finally boiled over. Some companies have sunk millions of dollars into supporting Nintendo 64, and are increasingly unsure and confused as to what the payoff will be and when they can expect it. The endless delays of the machine have compounded the problem.

EX-DICTATOR IS VIDEOGAME NUT

NEWSLINE: Apparently, General Pinochet, ex-dictator and now army commander of Chile, is an avid videogame player. According to *The Economist* magazine, Pinochet spends hour upon hour playing on his PC. Not entirely surprisingly, his favorite genre is war games. The general has been playing them in order to improve tactical thinking in his fast-modernizing army.

BOTTOMLINE: Unfortunately, all this fun comes at a price. His elder son claims that the "magnetic fields" from his PC have affected the 80-year-old Pinochet's pacemaker, and have sent him into the hospital with high-blood pressure problems.

And you thought your friends were weird.

The business news that affects the games you play

by Christian Svensson
Christian Svensson is the assistant editor and webmaster at Next Generation Online which can be found at <http://www.next-generation.com/>



ng

The issues affecting the way games are made

Generator

by George Zachary

George Zachary, who, when working with Silicon Graphics, was interviewed in NG 14, is now a partner at Mohr Davidow Ventures, a technology venture capital firm. To contact George, try sending e-mail to him at gzachary@mdv.com



All polygons are not created equal

Seemingly everyone in the game business is talking about how 3D technology is revolutionizing the world of gaming. (In reality, technology isn't revolutionizing anything — all it is doing is expanding the design envelope for 3D games. But that's a different story altogether). Thus, the race is on among 3D graphics accelerator manufacturers to capitalize on this big, new demand for PC 3D graphics power.

Game developers are being bombarded by these companies with pleas to have the next megahit adapted to their hardware technology (the fruits of one such deal that worked — Namco and VideoLogic — can be seen on page 54). Meanwhile, gamers are being bombarded with marketing hype and advertising claiming to cite “technological proof” as to why each and every different company has the “best” 3D graphics chip for this new generation of 3D games.

The tricky issue is how does a consumer differentiate and substantiate these performance claims? Consumers need to do this so they can figure out what 3D graphics hardware to buy.

I've seen it from both sides of the fence.

Being a Silicon Valley venture capitalist, I've seen many start-up business plans focused on 3D graphics acceleration hardware. As a former “marketeer” with Silicon Graphics, I understood how to show the technical world that we had the “best” graphics.

In each of these experiences, it comes down to claims surrounding a hardware's “polygons-per-second” capability. It seems to be the “standard” way of measuring 3D graphics performance, yet within the next two years, “XX polygons per second” statements will mean absolutely nothing to everyone.

The reason is that “polygons per second” is a generic statement that does not truly represent the true performance of a 3D graphics system. (Please notice that I'm using the word “system” here and not “chip.”)

The first problem is that, unfortunately, there is no single definition of a polygon. There are at least 20 significant adverbs that modify “polygon.” These adverbs include anti-aliased, Gouraud-shaded, texture-mapped, perspective-corrected, Z-buffered, triangle-meshed, lit, Mip-mapped, trilinear interpolated, etc. These adverbs can be used with on or more of each other (Z-buffered, perspective-corrected polygons, for example) and as a result, there are literally thousands of different types of polygons, all legitimate, and no single way to describe or measure them with any kind of standard.

What we're being exposed to by the marketers of current 3D graphics companies is a selective usage of adverbs. These descriptors allow for “marketing” polygon performance to be 100 times better than their “application” polygon performance.

“Polygons per second” is a generic statement that does not truly represent the true performance of a 3D graphics system

The huge range of adverbs enables the marketer to concoct the “right kind” of polygon that indicates a huge difference between in performance between his firm's hardware and the competition's.

The bad news for consumers is that the amount of polygon types will only increase over the next two years as engineers develop and implement new graphics features.

Silicon Graphics' customers (artists and engineers) are highly educated about this “marketing” polygon problem and do not blindly accept the generic polygon marketing statements. As a result, Silicon Graphics gives its salespeople a 75-page booklet that lists all of the 3D graphics benchmarks for each workstation. This booklet enables each salesperson to provide a very specific benchmark to those people who ask.

A similar phenomena is now starting to happen in the world of both computer and console gaming. Over the past 18 months, a steady stream of 3D graphics chip companies have claimed that they can do two times the amount of polygons as the competition. However, game developers are now beginning to ask hardware developers for specific

benchmarks such as: “How many anti-aliased, tri-linear interpolated, Mip-mapped, lit, Z-buffered, Gouraud-shaded 25-pixel triangles can you both transform and pixel-fill onto a 640x480 screen?”

Game developers need to know the answers to these questions so they know how to best take advantage of the hardware. Even more importantly, they need to understand the subtle and intricate relationship between having different types and modes of polygons active on the screen at the same time.

Consumers, however, are not asking these questions yet and they probably won't. There is just too much jargon for consumers to learn. The history of consumer marketing indicates that they will actually stay away from educating themselves on these issues. Consumers will continue to use screen-shots, demo shareware, magazine reviews, and salesperson recommendations as the major influences on their purchasing decisions.

So, each 3D graphics company has a choice: either sell pseudo-“benchmarks” to consumers and bore them, or sell real “benchmarks” to game developers with a view to selling consumers the resulting game that truly shows off its 3D power.

Sega and Nintendo have had this figured out for years. Computer gaming companies have a window of opportunity now to execute this same strategy on the PC. If they don't do it, expect the console market to remain dominant and consumer's decision process to be really easy — don't bother buying a PC 3D graphics card at all.

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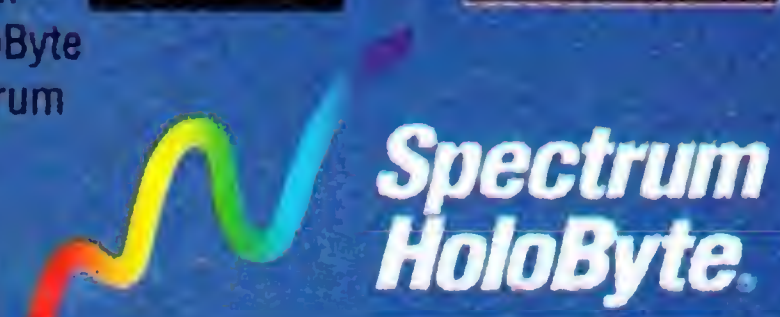
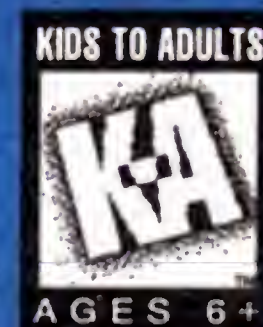


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breaking

Takara and Virtuality

A home version of Virtuality's VR HMD will be released later this year

head homeward

Japanese-based Takara has teamed up with British-based Virtuality to produce a home version of Virtuality's VR HMD unit. Virtuality previously had a deal to produce a VR headset with Atari for Jaguar, but for obvious reasons this is no longer an

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ongoing plan. This new machine will be launched in Japan in September for the yen equivalent of about \$360. First-year sales in Japan are predicted to be about 50,000 units.

The first version of the unit essentially will be little more than a viewing headset which will work with consoles or TV (similar to the Virtual i/o glasses). The headset creates the illusion of watching a giant TV screen, with a 55° viewing scope (the maximum viewing scope of the human eye is 70°). However, a source

at Virtuality told **Next**

Generation that if the project is successful, an upgraded version with software will appear which utilizes head-tracking technology. Virtuality maintains that a low-cost version of its \$25,000 full-blown arcade machine is feasible "sooner rather than later," with infra-red head-tracking (at a higher price) which will use scaled-down versions of the software on which Virtuality's \$25,000 arcade machines are based. The next generation, rather than this one, will qualify for the "VR" tagline.

Virtuality, founded in 1987, is the largest dedicated VR company in the world. It claims a 78% market share and an installed base of 1,300 units in 41 countries. As well as arcade machines, it develops tools for training and other uses. It has stated its objectives of dominating "emerging VR markets" and striking deals with strategic partners. Takara is one of Japan's biggest manufacturers of toys with 1995 sales exceeding \$500 million. Looped into the deal is a Takara-owned company called Media Robotics, which specializes in the planning, development, and sales of entertainment robots.



If the project is successful, an upgraded version with software will appear which utilizes head-tracking technology

Once again, the elusive dream of home virtual reality takes one step closer toward reality

Datebook

June

The first annual **I-Magic Awards Festival** has been moved forward and will be held this June 17 through 20 (not April 17 through 18 as previously reported), at the New York Information Technology Center, New York, New York. This event provides achievement awards for excellence in consumer relevant categories. Contact Bonnie Harper at 1 (212) 431-8923 for more information.

PC Expo in New York will host the inaugural **WEB.X**, the Internet event for business, Tuesday through Thursday, June 18 to 20 at the Jacob Javits Convention Center in New York. Featuring Internet, World Wide Web, e-mail communications, and more, this show is important for net junkies and business professionals. Contact the Blenheim Group at 1 (800) 829-3976 or 1 (201) 346-1400.

The 14th annual **PC EXPO** will take place on Tuesday through Thursday, June 18 through June 20, at the Javits Convention Center in New York, NY. The largest personal computer expo on the East coast will host 850 exhibitors and expects 130,000 attendees. With its focus on PC hardware, peripherals, software, LAN products, workstations, mainframes, and Internet-related products, the PC Expo should be a thorough chronicle of the PC's future directions. This is for trade business persons only. Please call 1 (800) 829-3976 or (201) 346-1400, ext. 145, or e-mail: <http://www.shownet.com>.

July

Web Interactive '96 will be held Wednesday through Friday, July 31 through August 2, at the Sheraton New York Hotel and Towers, in New York, NY. This event will be informative for website developers, multimedia producers and developers, publishers and broadcasters, with the content focusing on the top Internet software and hardware from the most significant vendors in the business (not open to the public). Complete up-to-date listings are at <http://events.iworld.com/summer96/webint>, or call 1 (800) meckler, FAX (203) 226-6976, or e-mail at info@mecklermedia.com.

September

AMOA, the **Amusement and Music Operators Association**, will hold its annual event this year from Thursday to Saturday, September 26 to 28 in the Dallas Convention Center, Dallas, Texas. This event is not open to the public, but will show the newest arcade games, redemption games, virtual reality games, pinball machines, jukeboxes, etc. to the industry. For more information please contact Fred Newton at AMOA, (312) 245-1021; or e-mail amoa@sba.com.

November

IAPPA, the **International Association of Amusements and Attractions**, is like a big arcade show except for the simulators, rides, and amusement attractions, for which it's famous. Closed to the public, it's held from November 20 to the 23 in New Orleans, LA, at the New Orleans Convention Center. Call 1 (703) 836-4800 for more info.

SHOW ORGANIZERS: If your show isn't listed here, well, that's because you haven't told us about it. Call (415) 468-4684, FAX information to (415) 468-4686, or send details to **DATEBOOK**, **Next Generation**, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005.



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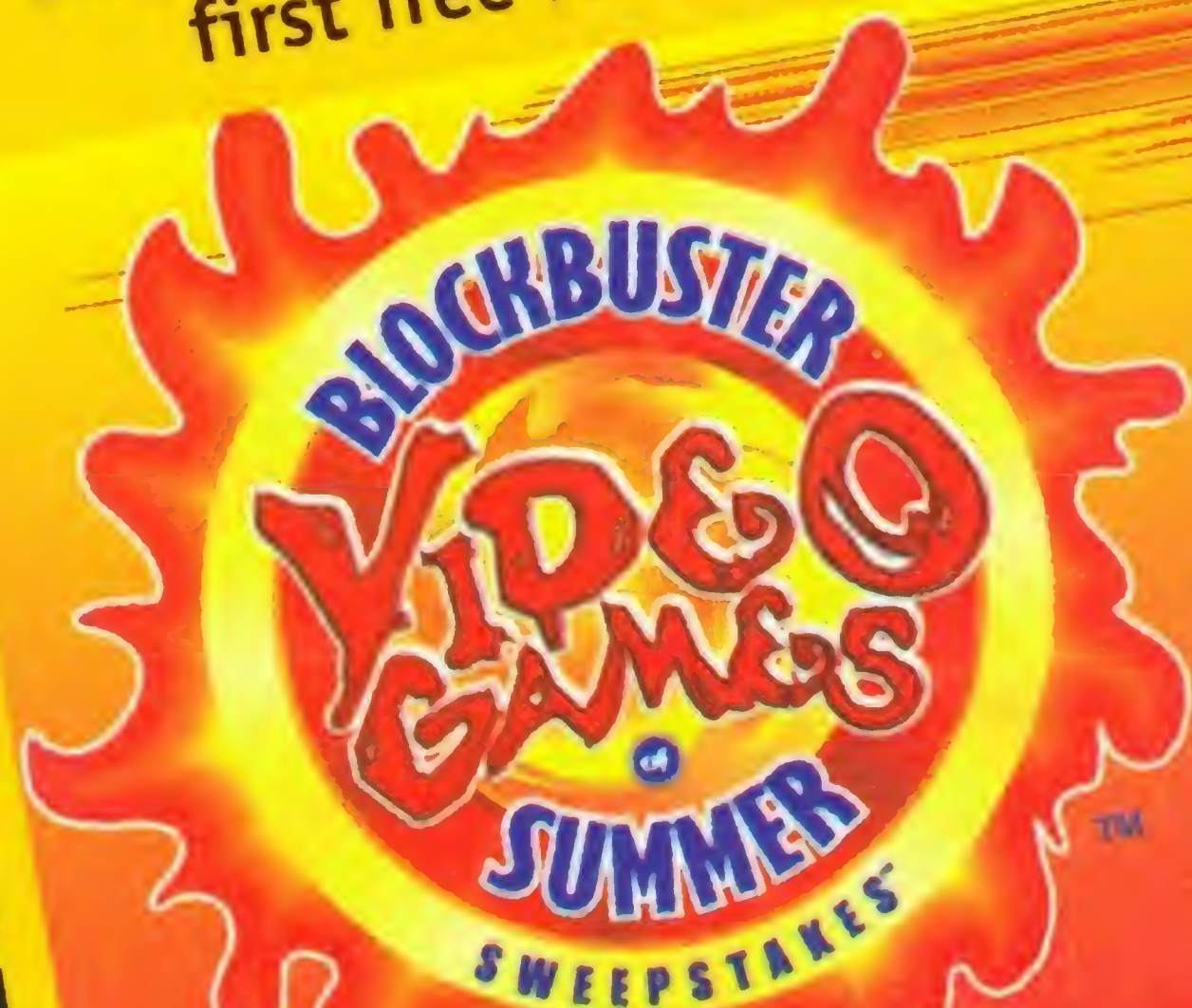
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Getting

Connected



There's no doubt that playing games against a human is infinitely more fun than playing against a computer. Until recently, however, graphic multiplayer gaming was solely the domain of those with access to their workplace's local area network — not the ideal place to play games. But now all this is changing

Online, multiplayer gaming is the hot new topic of conversation in the game industry. But is it really the future? Eventually, will all games be "sold" as downloads, doing away with CDs and cartridges? Where is the technology heading? And what obstacles stand in the way of it getting there? What is certain is that whether you play games on a PC or a console, within the next two years, you'll be playing a lot of your gaming online. In this **Next Generation** report, we examine the main issues facing online gaming's growth, as well as profiling the companies involved in getting you connected.

There have been multiplayer electronic games since the dawn of computing. *Space War!*, the first real videogame, programmed by Steve Russell on the PDP-1, was an exclusive two-player game. So was Nolan Bushnell's pioneering coin-op *Pong*. But a partner with whom to

Traditional online services

The traditional online services have always offered at least some measure of entertainment online, although it has generally been below the level of sophistication that is available on the PC. Expect this to start to change soon, however, as several major deals are expected to be announced at the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E³). Here's a look at what's currently on offer:

America Online

The biggest, and many would say the blandest, of the online services currently offers mainly text-based games. These titles include: *Gemstone III*, a fantasy RPG; *Federation*, a science-fiction role-playing and trading game; and *Modus Operandi*, a film-noir-style RPG. All are fun, although none



The America Online interface makes getting into *Federation* somewhat easier



CIS's *BlackDragon* (top) and AOL's *Modus Operandi* are multiplayer games, but text only

push the technological envelope (the familiar AOL interface makes a good place to start for novices, however). AOL also offers some wacky quiz-show style "games," (nice for your mom, maybe), and *NeverWinter Nights*, a graphic AD&D adventure for PCs only. The Engage service should be available through AOL by the end of the year.

CompuServe

This is the oldest of the major online services, and it shows in terms of the games available. For those who wish to emulate disgruntled employees, there's the



Sniper, from CompuServe, is as close as games get to being graphic on the system

ever exciting *Air Traffic Controller* simulation, as well as several single-player text only adventures, like *CastleQuest* and *BlackDragon*. *British Legends* and *Island of Kesmai* are multiplayer, although still text-only. There is also a semi-graphic WW2 squad level sim called *Sniper!* Although the service is not cheap, and the text can be intimidating to gamers weaned on *Mario*, there is some real depth in the gameplay here. CompuServe recently announced a deal with WorldsAway, which will enable you to control an avatar in a 3D graphic world. It isn't exactly a game, but it should be fun to explore, especially if you are a fan of the social aspect of multiplayer gaming.

play games was not always available, so inevitably, one-player games soon sprung into existence.

It quickly became apparent, however, that while the satisfaction of beating a computer's artificial intelligence could be immense, the main satisfaction of getting a high score was in knowing that you had not only beat the computer, but also every other human gamer who had played the game since it was plugged in.

Today, nearly all of the most popular games in the arcade feature simultaneous two-player modes (either on one machine, or in the case of driving games, through two or more machines networked together). Just think

about it for a second, how popular would the fighting game genre be now if the two-player option in *Street Fighter* or *Mortal Kombat* didn't exist?

And it doesn't just stop at two players. Four-player *Bombberman* is generally considered the best console game ever at the Next Generation office (where news of HudsonSoft's imminent 10-player *Bombberman*



for Saturn was greeted with displays of near apoplexy by some staffers). Games like PC *Doom*, or *WarCraft II* which support four PC players or more via local area networks, are famous for their staying power. Name a shareware program



other than *Doom* that's played as often more than three years after its release.

Multiplayer games offer not only important social contact with other human beings, they offer a far greater challenge than computer AI. While almost anyone can eventually learn what a game AI will do in a given situation, and defeat the game (as attested to by victories of 25 to 0 by players who have learned the "shoot-the-corner" trick in EA's *NHL '96*), humans change their strategies, do clever (and capriciously stupid), unpredictable things. They learn, innovate, and generally keep things far more interesting than does the computer AI.

"[Multiplayer] games are an excuse to socialize, an excuse to connect with other



Looking for cutting-edge content and technology? Don't bother with Prodigy

Prodigy

Prodigy doesn't have a reputation for cutting-edge content, and its game offering isn't likely to change that. Although you can play *Checkers* with another person, beyond that you're basically limited to trivia contests, an odd version of *MineSweeper*, and a few other dismal entries. Oh yeah,



SVGA Air Warrior, one of GENie's multiplayer games. It's a good place to kill novices

and some of them cost extra money to play, beyond the connect fee.

GENie

Although GENie failed to take off when the online revolution hit, and the service was recently sold (leaving its future less than crystal clear), it was — until the arrival of the ImagiNation Network — the only place to play graphic Net games. There's *SVGA Air Warrior*, a multiplayer flight sim, and *BattleTech*. There are also several text-based RPGs: *Gemstone III*, *Federation*, and



INN's football sim has proved to be one of the service's most popular applications

Island Kesmai). GENie plans to support *Descent* soon, and will be adding *Armor Assault*, a tank game, and a first-person graphic RPG, *Dragon's Tale*, soon. Overall, GENie has more than 20 multiplayer games.

The ImagiNation Network

Designed from the ground up as an online gaming service, INN never found its niche. Maybe because it was fairly unstable, maybe



INN's Red Baron takes you to the skies of Europe, circa 1917 for some WWI dog fighting

because it didn't have enough high-speed access lines, and maybe it was because the pricing model seemed to change daily... who knows. While it's still around, you can play some Sierra-quality graphic adventures, *Red Baron*, head-to-head football, and casino and traditional card games (Microsoft's Bill Gates uses the service to play Bridge).

However, INN has plans to totally revamp its service soon, updating its graphics, moving to Windows 95, and changing its name to Cyber Park. Cyber Park will be a fully navigable 3D environment similar to *WorldsAway* (but with games) and should be accessible through the Internet, and possibly through hooks on other online services. Will this be enough to change its fortunes? It's currently unclear, but anything will be better than the way things are now. One thing INN does have in its favor is first refusal on every Sierra game.

ng

human beings," says Jeff Liebowitz, president of the recently announced InterPlay game network spin-off Engage. "It's somewhat analogous to nightclubs or bars. You want a nice atmosphere, a good bartender, good food and all that, but the real reason you're there is to socialize."

Given the truism, then, that the more human beings involved in the game, the better the gameplay experience (generally), we are left with the two questions: How can a solitary gamer be sure of finding a human to play against? And, what is the best manner in which to get the maximum number of people playing at the same time? While two people playing at once on one screen is fine for fighting games, using a split-screen for strategy games like *Herzog Zwei* or

Return Fire can be irritating and, with few exceptions, attempting to engage more than two players (nice for PC games like *Command and Conquer*) on one screen is impossible. It also requires that the two players be in the same physical location.

"Multiplayer games are an excuse to socialize, to connect with others"

Jeff Liebowitz, president of Engage

For PC users, the solution is simple. Sort of. Playing a game with more than one person on multiple PCs over a LAN is a neat solution, except that very few people actually have access to a PC LAN, except, of course, at work.

What every PC user does have

potential access to, however, is a modem. By playing games over the Internet, the number of users who can play is constrained only by technological limitations and by game design. (When you get to 1,000-player *Doom*, you run not only against real physical limitations on the game server, but you start to lose the important socialization elements present in, say, an eight-person game, in which you can really get to know — and hate — the people you're playing against.)

Playing games over a network isn't anything new, of course. Many of the first text-only games, like *Dungeon* and *Adventure*, were played online on dumb terminals attached to mainframes. Multiplayer, text-based fantasy RPGs, known as MUDs, first appeared almost 20 years ago. Although younger players,

Dedicated game services

Diving the multiplayer gaming revolution are not just the developers of great games which can be played online, but also the companies providing the services to enable gaming online. Their challenges are clear. They must make the technology easy to use, overcome several critical technical problems, as well as present a compelling reason to use their service over that of their competitors'. To that end, the gaming services are busy sewing up exclusive deals with developers and publishers, as well as constantly upgrading their technology.



DWANGO

(<http://www.dwango.com/>)

The oldest of the pure gaming services, the Dial-up Wide Area Network Gaming Operation (DWANGO) is not currently based on the Internet. Instead, subscribers must call one of 23 local servers directly (possibly a toll call), at which point they can

play anyone else connected to that local server. Forget about playing against old college friends across the country for now.

DWANGO's strong points are its speed, the quality of the players on the system (who are the the best), the fact that it's here now, and most importantly, the quality of the games supported. With support for *Doom*, *Doom II*, *Heretic*, *Hexen*, and *Terminal Velocity*, the content is sumptuously strong. Support for other games is "coming soon," according to the company website, which contains the client software as well as demos, etc.

Total Entertainment Network (TEN)

(<http://www.ten.net/>)

With \$12 million in venture capital, as well as exclusive deals with Apogee (a.k.a. 3D Realms, the *Duke Nukem 3D* people), Spectrum Holobyte (*Falcon 4.0*), and SSI (*Panzer General*, *Renegade II*), TEN (created by the merger of Mac gaming site Outland, and Planet Optigon) is poised for greatness in the gaming service world.



TEN is probably the best marketed gaming service out there, and it has been signing deals for games at an astonishing pace. By going straight to developers and evangelizing its software development kit and APIs, the company has gone a long way to solving the ease of the use problem, too — you will be able to automatically install and configure the TEN client from within any TEN supported game. The service will also include record keeping, profiles of



With a "hip" interface, TEN hopes to be more than just a game server to its users

players, and hooks for social interaction (chat boxes and e-mail, although not Internet e-mail, which is odd). The big question for TEN will be its ability to work over the Internet, with all the latency problems that come with it (there will be direct dial-ups in larger markets to increase speed). With three T3 lines worth of connectivity to the Internet, although, any delays will not likely come from TEN's end.

weaned on graphics-intensive games may not think much of them, MUDs offer extremely rich virtual worlds to explore, realtime interaction with other human beings, and complicated adventures and quests that put even the most intricate SquareSoft or KOEI RPG to shame.

For console users, the story is a little different. While there is no technical reason why a console can't use a modem (indeed, console modems have been promised since the days of the ColecoVision), it wasn't until late 1994, with the introduction of Catapult's XBand for Genesis and later, Super NES, that a console modem was introduced in the US. Indeed, the road to online console gaming is littered with failures, most notably AT&T's ill-fated but much-hyped Edge-16, which was introduced at the 1993

Consumer Electronic Show (CES). Set to feature simultaneous voice and data transmission, it was scrapped in 1994, when it was realized that a \$150 add-on requiring the user to find someone with whom to play (unlike XBand, which has its

Multiplayer, text-based RPGs, known as MUDs, appeared 20 years ago

own game brokering and news and information service) just wasn't going to be a big seller.

In Japan, however, console modems have had a long history. Nintendo introduced a modem, as well as an online service for the original Famicom, but it failed to catch on, even after it was

revamped as a Super Famicom online gaming service.

The future prognosis of console gaming-by-modem may be changing, however. Sega will be introducing an Internet-ready Saturn later this year (using technology licensed from Catapult), and rumors of a web-browser for PlayStation are rife. Nintendo is known to be in discussion with Netscape Communications (presumably regarding licensing the popular *Netscape Navigator* web browser) and has been known to be pursuing the dream of online gaming for years, both as a profitable spin-off of its successful GateWay system, and as a means of replacing cartridges. (Indeed, the fact that Nintendo 64's disk drive will be writeable, and the fact that Nintendo has made a determined effort to keep the size of its game code small — they currently

XBand PC

(<http://www.xband.com/>)

That's right, XBand, the 16-bit modem operation, has a PC gaming service as well. Basically, it follows the TEN model, with a couple of key differences. Unlike the 16-bit



Unlike its 16-bit version, XBand PC will be more than just a game broker service

network, you won't simply be able to play with local players, unless you want to play a game which requires an extremely low latency, like *Street Fighter*. That may be XBand PC's hook, since the system's expertise at matching local players for low latency play is unsurpassed. For other games, a series of high-speed connections between ISPs around the country and game servers that are in turn hooked to XBand PC's main office in Cupertino, CA will make an end run around the Internet to achieve lowered latency.

XBand's exclusive roster includes *Zombie*, *Accolade*, and *Capcom* at present. The service, which runs under Windows 95, enables you to have an online persona, and will provide news, reviews, e-mail, chat rooms, and more. X-Band's 16-bit

experience may not have made much cash (the service took off just as 16-bit crash landed), but it's keen to stress that it's a long way up a learning curve upon which many of its competitors are just embarking.

Engage

(<http://www.gamesonline.com>)

Engage is the latest gaming service to be announced. This independent company is an InterPlay spin-off. Not much was known about the system at press time (this writing is pre-E³, where new partners will be revealed), except that it should be accessible both over the Net and through commercial online services (including AOL). Exclusive deals will presumably be with InterPlay, among others. The only games we've confirmed support for are *Descent* and InterPlay's new PC *Bombberman*.



Mplayer GameWay

(<http://www.mpath.com>)

MPath's MPlayer will be another direct competitor to XBand PC and TEN. The company's twist is a partnering strategy with PSINet, an ISP known for fast connect



A typical pregame chat on MPlayer involves who's running a good game at the moment

times. Although users will be able to use other ISPs, the system will be optimized for use with PSINet. Are gamers willing to change ISPs to use the service most effectively? It remains to be seen. MPath is keen to stress that it doesn't need to.

GameWay will support at least 15 various titles at launch, including *Terminal Velocity*, *SimCity 2000*, *Chaos Lords*, and "a number of titles from SegaSoft," said an Mpath spokesman.

There are also several solo game sites, like Interactive Creations, Inc.'s *Warbirds* server (<http://www.icgames.com>). And if the idea of using a commercial service seems like cheating, consider KALI, which enables you to set up your PC to play any games that support the IPX network protocol over the Internet. You can find KALIPPP.ZIP at <ftp://ftp.internexus.net/pub/kali>. It's a \$20 shareware program.

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all have to fit on cartridges, remember — both perhaps point to secret plans to take Nintendo 64 gaming exclusively online.)

Until the last

couple of years, however, a number of factors precluded the playing of graphic, fast-action games over the Internet. First, despite a few proprietary games, such as those offered by the ImagiNation Network (which was started by Sierra in 1990) and the online service GENie, there was no infrastructure in place to coordinate the playing of graphic games on the Net. That infrastructure didn't develop until developers like Id included network support in their products.

Second, not enough people were online until today to justify the cost of



supporting commercial games over the Internet (most MUDs are free, hosted by university systems and maintained by volunteers). "The biggest impediment to

online gaming is getting people online!" says Liebowitz. "Only 5% of the population is really online, and 95% of the people who could use personal computers and modems simply

don't." This is the real challenge, getting people comfortable with being online.

"And only maybe 10% to 20% of these online people play games," Liebowitz continues. "On the other hand, when you do play a game, you're online for a pretty long time. I would suspect that around



40% of the total time spent online is spent playing games." Ironically, the 40% figure is the same number quoted by Microsoft about the percentage of time home PCs are used for playing games.

Third, game configuration hassles, already legendary on the PC, increase immensely when you also have to configure your game with your Internet service provider. "Configuring the PC for the Internet connection and actually just getting things to work is a huge impediment," says Alex Beltramo, of the Total Entertainment Network (TEN).

The largest issue, though, has been that of network speed, or — more specifically — latency. Latency is a measure of not how much information can be transferred in a certain time (this is

Game console options



Currently, Saturn and PlayStation owners have no online multiplayer options. (The only "linking up" that's done is with Sony's link-up capabilities for two-player PlayStation titles.) But that's likely to change later this year, thanks to Catapult's XBand. We spoke to Adam Grosser, president of Catapult, about online gaming options for console owners.

NG: Is Catapult pursuing network gaming on the 32-bit platforms?

Adam: Definitely. We're actively working on 32-bit development. We won't produce the modems themselves, but we're doing a Saturn version of XBand in Japan right now. It launched on April 1. The installed base makes Japan the only viable market at the



BAND™

moment. We're in discussion with the other console companies — the technology is fairly generic, and can be ported successfully.

NG: When can we expect to see 32-bit console XBand in the U.S.?

Adam: A console network won't really come to the forefront until '97, when you've got a lot of machines out there and the prices drop fairly dramatically compared to PCs. Right now people are very interested in PCs because the price delta is not that significant. When you see Sega and Sony price their machines under \$200, you'll see a lot more interest.

NG: What did you learn from the 16-bit XBand experience?

Adam: The trial of the system is really important. When you've got a

subscription-based product in a glass case at Toys R Us, it's hard to demonstrate how cool it is. We learned that traditional marketing was really tough and demonstration was really important. Second, it's really easy for Sega and Nintendo to deal with the hardware aspect of it, whereas it was really difficult for us. For example, a Sega-branded modem is something a consumer will accept really readily. So we've decided to license to the developers (we have a lot of patents and technologies) rather than sell the hardware ourselves. We'll just be operating the service.

NG: Will console users be able to play PC users on XBand?

Adam: If you come to our office, you can play a Saturn vs. a PC version, but it's a



The 16-bit and 32-bit versions support e-mail and stats. We hope e-mail will be over two lines

bandwidth), but the minimum time it takes for even the smallest message to be sent, received, and understood. Imagine pulling a move in *Street Fighter Alpha* and not having it execute on screen for half a second and you begin to understand the magnitude of the problem.

Some games work fine despite extremely long latencies — chess, or turn-based strategy games (both of which can be played by mail) for example. Others, like flight sims (which can roughly work out — given your direction and velocity — where you should be at any given time), can function with higher latencies. But fast games, like fighting games or *Doom*-style action games, require near-instant response.



Typically, it is estimated that "arcade style" (for want of a better description) games require latencies of less than 0.25 seconds. A standard Internet connection, however, generally comes with a latency of

between 0.5 and 1 whole second.

The solutions to beating the latency issue are numerous. Some networks, like DWANGO, do it by bypassing the Internet altogether

in favor of local, dial-up servers. Players have little more latency than on a LAN, but if they're more than a local call away from one of DWANGO's 23 U.S. servers, they'll have to pay long-distance phone charges in addition to the standard connect fees.



TEN, one of the first gaming services that will be accessible through the Internet (it also has DWANGO-style dial-up servers) has invested a massive amount of effort in beating latency. It has an online

agent, "Mr. Bandwith," who checks your connection and lets you know which games you may want to avoid. You may be restricted to playing gamers close to you geographically, to keep down latency (which increases, obviously, with real physical distance). "By doing lots of little tricks, there are

lots of different ways we can chip away at the latency issue," says a TEN spokesman.

Others, however, see the latency issue as a paper tiger. Liebowitz simply doesn't see it as much of a problem at all. "Very few games require low latency," Liebowitz



XBand PC player bios give you a feel for your opponents. The Saturn and other console versions will support a similar player-bio section. Console and PC players will be able to compete if developers include support in their apps

question of the content developer. Will they develop the software for this? But we designed our systems with that eventuality in mind, so you can play PlayStation *Doom* versus Saturn *Doom* versus PC *Doom*.

NG: Will this new service be entirely for games or...

Adam: No not at all. We have tournaments, events, news, e-mail... In Japan we have a celebrity game crew where rock stars and athletes and actors play in special tournament games.

NG: Which is more exciting to you personally, XBand PC, or XBand 32?

Adam: I'm excited about doing the PC right now because that's where the installed base and content is. I'm more excited about the consoles because it's a challenging technical problem, and of course, we have no competitors in the [console] market right now — and there's no one on the horizon, either. We have a very strong patent position, as well as having solved some very difficult sync problems. A lot of

people have tried and not gotten it right. I don't know of anyone working on [console network gaming] at all. Instead, we're licensing our system in Europe, Korea, and we are bringing the network to South America. On the console side, XBand is pretty much it.

NG: XBand PC uses a different model (actual game servers) than XBand 16-bit did, where mostly what you did was broker local calls between users. Which model will XBand 32 follow?

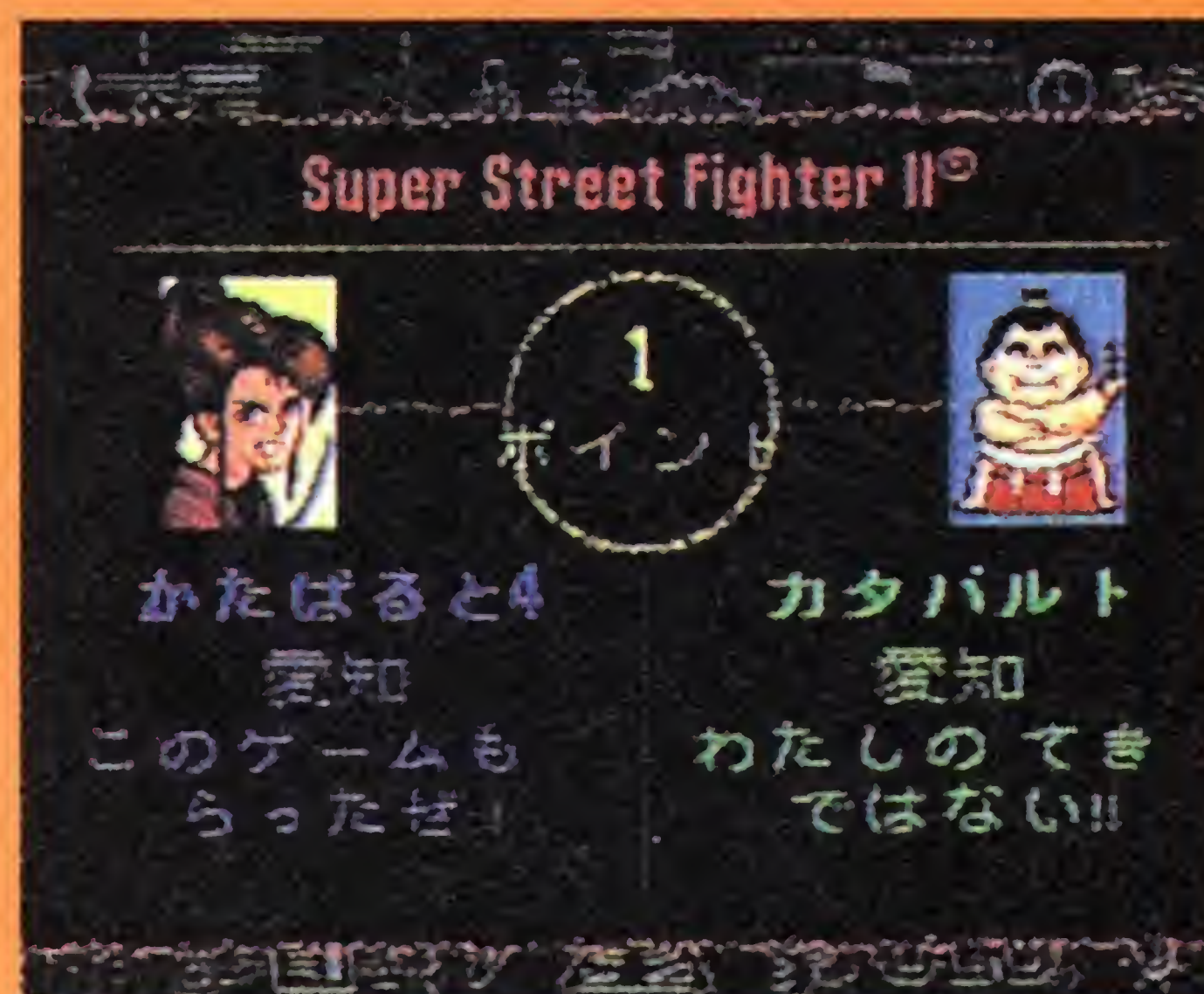
Adam: XBand 32 will use the PC model.

NG: So, when is it going to launch?

Adam: Not until late 1996 or early 1997. We're really waiting for the Nintendo 64 launch and seeing how that goes.

We're talking with Sony. Even with them claiming a million user installed base in the United States, that's not a giant installed base...

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Shots from the Japanese Saturn XBand give a feel for how the US version will look

says. "We played *Descent* in test mode with a one-second latency, and the play experience was excellent. Probably only with 10% of all games is latency a factor at all, and of that 10%, really only the top players would notice a latency."

Even for these players, however, Liebowitz is confident that the latency problem is temporary. "We've talked to companies in the telephony business" he continues, "and the cable business, and the modem business. Every one of them is spending tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars trying to solve the issue."

Although there are still a number of technical issues to be ironed out before playing a multiplayer game online is as easy as putting a CD into your PlayStation and turning it on, it's clear that online gaming isn't going to go away.

1996's most popular PC games — *Command and Conquer*, *WarCraft II*, *Duke Nukem 3D* — are designed for multiplayer online gaming, as are many of the most promising titles to be released through 1997, including Id's *Quake* and Blizzard's *Diablo*. Even classics like

"The biggest [obstacle] to online gaming is getting people online"

Jeff Liebowitz, president of Engage

Civilization have been revamped for online play (CivNet). And by the end of 1997, online gaming will likely be an option for console gamers as well.

What remains to be seen, however, is just who will be providing and selling the experience. While their current gaming

selections are fairly lacking, can the big online services (such as America OnLine) beat the challenge of the technically-superior dedicated gaming networks (such as TEN and MPath) by simple virtue of their large installed user base?

"The typical online services are not the model for the future," argues TEN's Alex Beltramo. "To appeal to gamers, you really need a narrowcast service, so I don't see a lot of competition coming from them."

Of course, once all the technical problems are solved (as they inevitably will be), and the market shakes down to two or three main game service providers (as it inevitably does), the emphasis will be back on those who really count — the game designers themselves. And let's just hope they're up to the task of realizing online gaming's potential.

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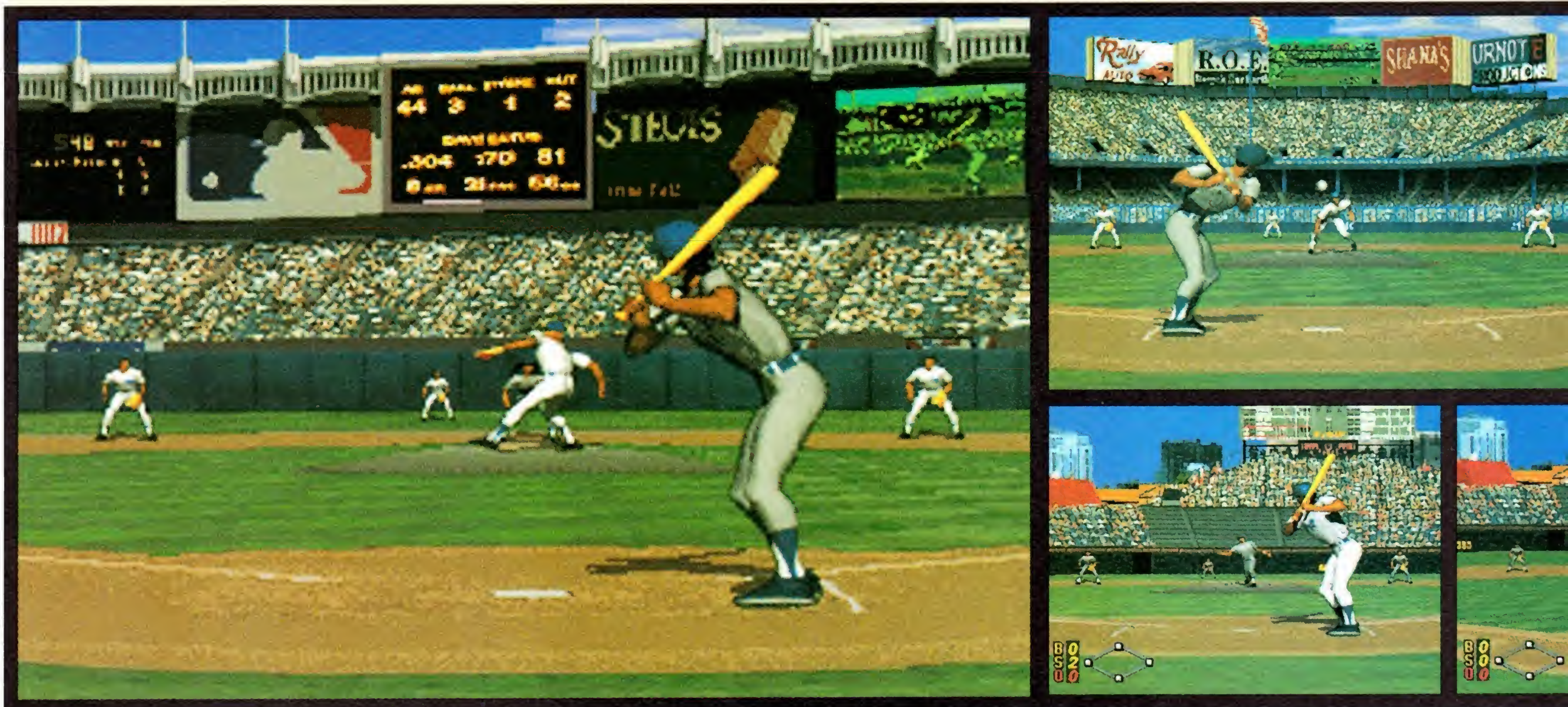
God

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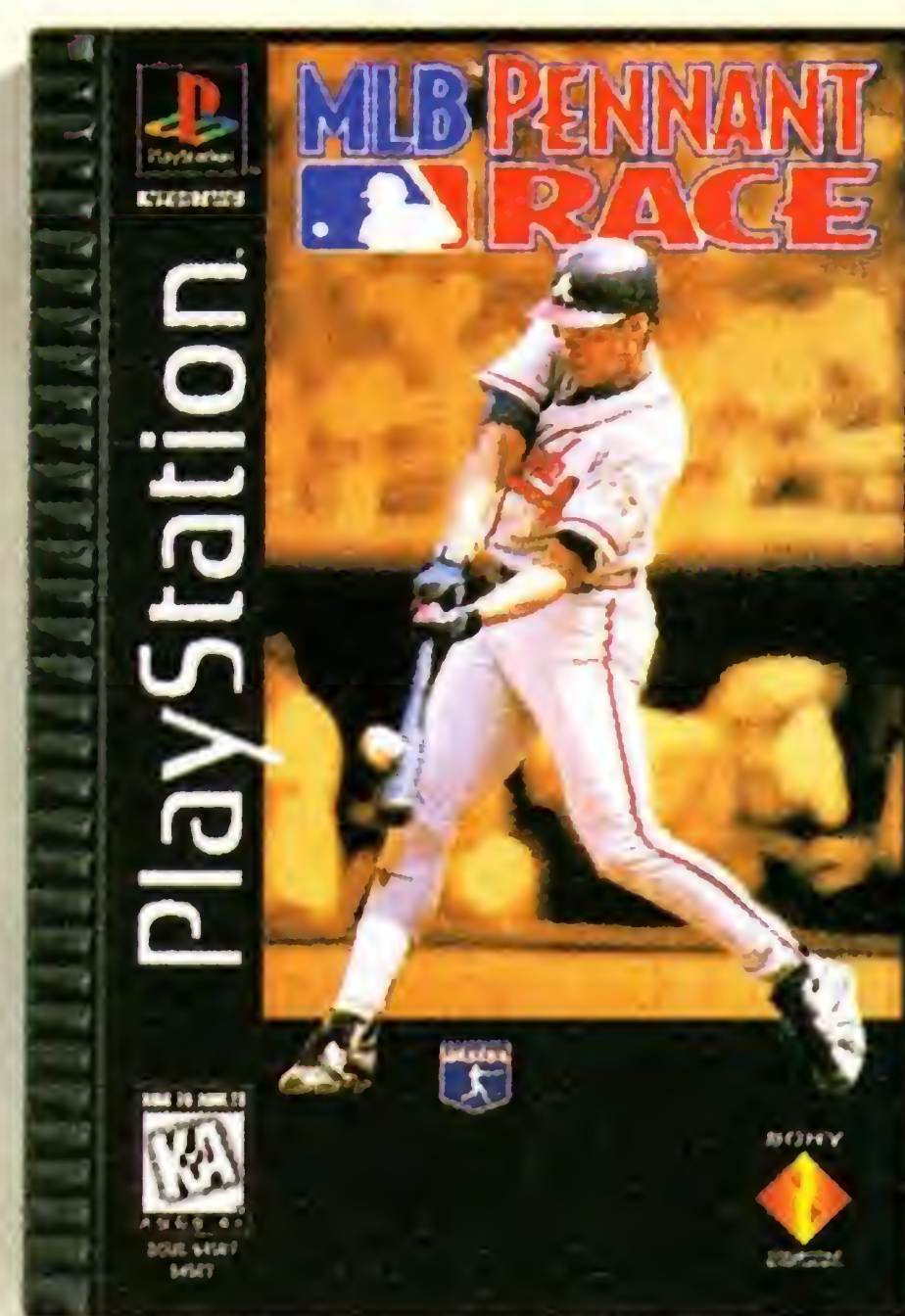
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Nights **Saturn** Crash Bandicoot **PS-X** E.O. **Saturn** Kowloon's Gate **PS-X** Rave Racer **PC CD-ROM**
 Star Gladiators **Arcade** Quake **PC CD-ROM** Bubsy 3D **PS-X** Sirens **PlayStation** Sonic X-Treme **Saturn**



Previews that touch the heart

Just when you thought it was safe to go back to console gaming, they're *heeere*: mascots. Those jump-on-their-heads critters with attitudes are exploding into 32-bit gaming with a vengeance. With a mix of horror and wry amusement, Next Gen presents the return of Sonic and Bubsy, Sony's newbie, Crash Bandicoot, and Capcom's first 3D brawler.

40 Nights **SATURN**

Sega pushes Saturn to the limit with a new 3D action game just packed with style

48 Crash Bandicoot **PS-X**

Sony's attempt at creating a PS-X mascot unearths the most obscure mammal yet

51 E.O. **SATURN**

Warp, the designers of *D*, give its eternal heroine a new haircut and a four-CD game

52 Kowloon's Gate **PLAYSTATION**

Sony of Japan's first in-house title boasts impressive graphic design on three CDs

54 Rave Racer **PC CD-ROM**

The sequel to *Ridge Racer* comes to the PC thanks to the PowerVR 3D accelerator

56 Star Gladiators **ARCADE**

The last of the 2D brawler holdouts, Capcom makes its first 3D fighting game

58 Quake **PC CD-ROM**

Id, the makers of *Doom*, bring us a game that's... just like *Doom*, only better — really

60 Bubsy 3D **PLAYSTATION**

In an issue packed with mascots, Accolade's bobcat takes a swipe at 3D

62 Sirens **PLAYSTATION**

The creators of *X-Men: Clone Wars* have gone 3D with an alarming cast of creatures

64 Sonic **SATURN, GENESIS**

The blue spiny one is back with two new games on two very different consoles

68 Konami **MULTIPLATFORM**

Konami's Nagata Akihiko speaks out on his company's 16-bit past and 32-bit future



 **SONIC
TEAM
PRESENTS**





Saturn software will take a leap into the third generation with the release of *Nights*, but will the dream-like world and atypical gameplay capture the attention of gamers? Sega's betting on it



Although the world is navigable in true 3D (top), most of the game is spent flying through rings on a track. Still, the gameplay feeling is one of freedom, not confinement



Sega Genesis, released into the unprecedented market dominance of the Nintendo Entertainment System in 1989, languished in

low sales until 1991. That was the year *Sonic the Hedgehog* was released — the year *Sonic* singlehandedly revolutionized character design, platform gameplay, and gave Sega the killer app and feisty mascot it needed to launch into the position of market leader.

Today, Sega is in a position similar to the one it was in prior to its release of *Sonic*. Despite the release of excellent exclusive arcade conversions like *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Sega Rally*, Saturn is, in

Format: **Saturn**

Publisher: **Sega**

Developer: **Sonic Team
(Sega Japan)**

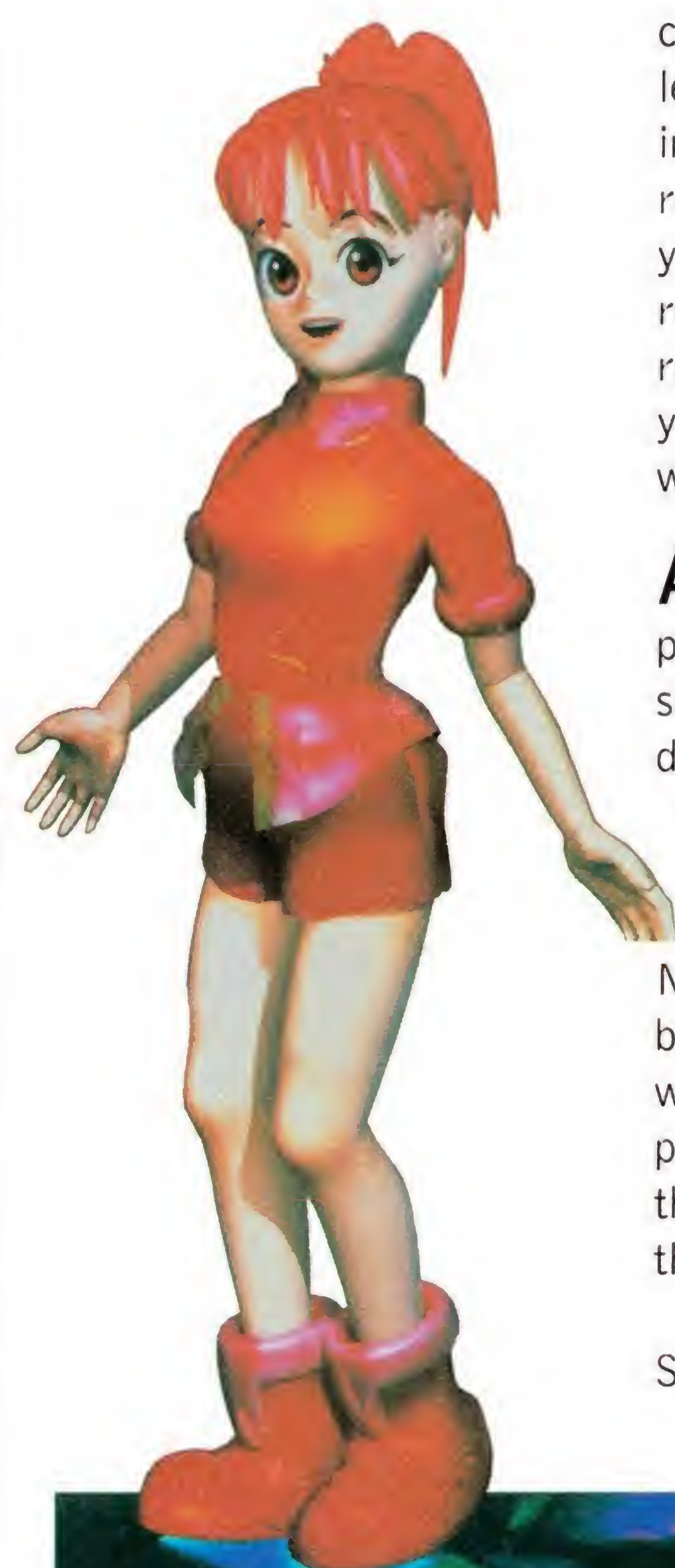
Release Date: **fall**

Origin: **Japan**

terms of sales, still trailing in in the 32-bit race behind Sony's PlayStation. Sega, however, is used to the role of the underdog, and to fight back, it's preparing a 3D Saturn update of *Sonic* (see alpha, pg. 64).

More than that, though, the original *Sonic* team — the innovative programmers and designers who developed "blast processing," the Sonic

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character, and the worlds he populated — has embarked in a bold new direction. It's embarked in what may well be the first title of the third wave of Saturn software. That's *Nights*.

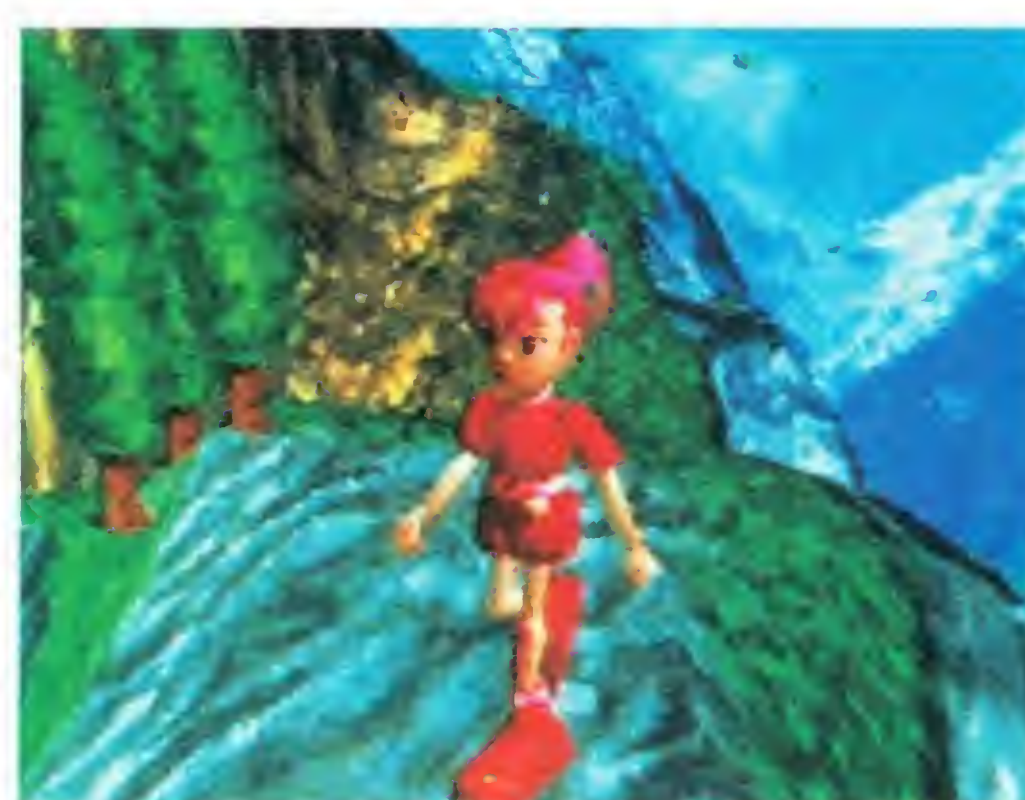
The main game concept of *Nights* comes from the lead programmer and level designer of *Sonic*, Yuji Naka (see interview, pg. 45). *Nights* bears little resemblance to the hackneyed plots of your average platformer. Instead of rescuing a princess, the player takes the role of either Clarise or Elliot, two young teens from the city of Twin Seeds who have never previously met.

After facing challenges during a particularly trying day, both characters share the same dream one night. In their dream, the world of Nighttopia, the character of *Nights* emerges to help guide the players to save Nighttopia from Nightware. According to Mr. Naka, "This is the main storyline, but behind this is the implication that those who have not fully explored their potential can overcome their fears when they use the strength of *Nights* to defeat the evil ruler."

It could be a metaphor for the Saturn itself, *Nights* pushes the system



The game's color palette, especially in the boss stages, shifts to much darker hues; the graphics as well, take on sharper, more forbidding shapes



When you're on the ground, movement is possible in all directions, as can be seen from the shot at lower left, though, all the real action is in the sky

far beyond any benchmark program so far — including Sega's remarkable port of *Virtua Fighter 2*.

Nights is set in an extremely fast-scrolling, fully 3D world. When on the ground, players can move in complete freedom, and control the camera angle to ensure a good view of the action. The main appeal of the game, however, is likely to come from the flying sequences. When Elliot or Clarise find the *Nights* suit, they become *Nights* and gain the power of flight.

The flying sequences are where the game truly begins to shine. An enormous amount of work went into perfecting the flying model — which grew out of Mr. Naka's experiences with creating the flight model for *Knuckles*. Even in the early playable demo which Next Generation has seen, it is already obvious that the *Nights* team has performed an exceptional job.

Although the player has full freedom of motion when on the ground, in the air the gameplay occurs on a branching track, due to feedback from early beta-testers, who found that gameplay was too difficult with full freedom when flying.

Although it contains some familiar goals, the gameplay paradigm is truly distinct from anything that has come



The texture maps and polygons in the game are of the highest quality



Although the team considered using an animal mascot as the main character, that idea was discarded to avoid seeming derivative of past side-scrollers



The camera angle changes automatically, although you can perform a manual override using the analog pad's trigger buttons

The original **Sonic** team has embarked on what may well be the first title of the third wave of Saturn titles

before. Instead of killing enemies and working one's way from left to right to eventually arrive at a boss, the player needs to execute precision flying maneuvers to collect gems while

attempting to locate the pods where the gems are collected. At other areas, the gems collected are "redeemed" to increase the time one has in the Nights suit.

When the time runs out, the player is dropped from the sky, and must find another Nights suit before he or she is caught by a marauding alarm clock

Because the Saturn controller was not found to be up to the task of controlling *Nights* when flying, the team developed a new analog pad that will ship with the game (presumably, it will also be compatible with future Saturn software). Expect the pad to look like a "fattened" Saturn controller, with a Nintendo 64-like analog stick located either above or below the current eight-way digital pad.

Both Sega, with its new analog joystick, and Nintendo, with its Nintendo 64 joystick, are offering gamers levels of control that have, quite simply, never been seen before on consoles. After a few moments of adjustment to the new stick, Next Generation found that even in the early



Like the original *Sonic the Hedgehog*, the emphasis is on exploration and the discovery of secrets — players can progress largely at their own pace — as opposed to simply battling to the end of each level



Both Naoto Oshima (top), and Takashi Ilzuka (above), *Sonic* team members, worked on all previous *Sonic* titles

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While this may be the most technically impressive Saturn title, it's not clear yet whether it will be a commercial success

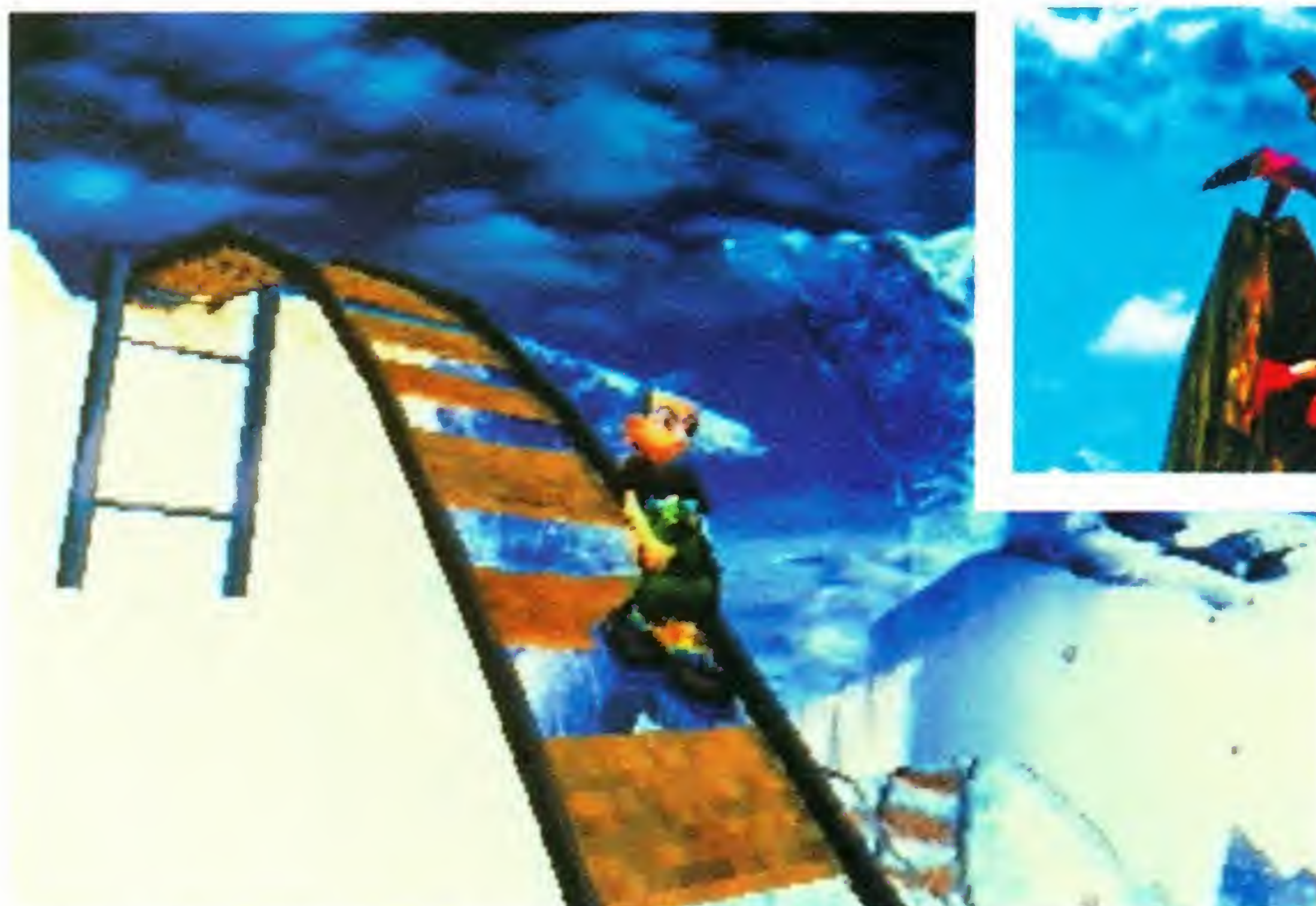
revision of the game we played, the level of player control surpassed anything that we had seen before. Coupled with the exceptionally fast graphics scrolling rate, the game looks to deliver one of the most immersive game experiences imaginable.

The dream-like quality of the game is enhanced by the character work of Naoto Oshima (Mr. Oshima created the Sonic character) and Takashi Iizuka, who was a designer on *Sonic The Hedgehog 3*, and is now designing the overall game world of *Nights*.

While this may be the most technically impressive Saturn title to date (and it is important to note that it

Although on paper, a game with exceptional control, a fast, polygonal 3D engine, and good graphics seems like a shoe-in for success, it will not be until the game is in the hands of players that anyone will know for sure if the gamble to do something different will succeed.

Sega faces a major marketing challenge with *Nights*. The look of the game is exceptionally Japanese, and the



As Elliot, you have to walk down this track. If you get ahold of the Nights suit, Nights will be able to morph into a sled and shoot down the slope



Flying around hoops and bars is exceptional fun. But although it takes skill and practice to perfect flying, it is unclear at this time as to whether this is challenging enough for hard-core gamers to ensure a *Sonic*-sized mega-hit

plot and nonviolent gameplay seem to skew its appeal toward younger gamers — exactly the opposite of Saturn's target. How Sega will convince older players to give the game a chance should be one of the year's more interesting marketing stories.

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Flying Nights feels right, a key component to success

was done almost entirely using custom libraries — the SGL "operating system" created by AM2 was used only sparingly), it is not at all clear yet whether it will be a commercial success, for a number of reasons. The game world and plot are not at all familiar — there is no princess rescuing, there is very little enemy dispatching, and the dream-world theme would seem to have more in common with a children's book than a videogame. The game's almost cartoony, dreamscape appearance may turn some players off as well.

Also, the gameplay paradigm is almost totally alien to today's conventional standards. It is an open question as to whether 1) players will be willing to step outside of the standard fighter-shooter-racer-platform genres to try a new type of action gameplay; and 2) whether or not the new play style is compelling enough to challenge and engage gamers.



The new Saturn analog pad is required in order to play *Nights* (it will ship with the game). The analog pad enables exceptional control of the character, especially when flying. The new "fattened" joypad's ease-of-use enables players total immersion. Traditional joystick usage is still available

An interview with Mr. Yuji Naka



interviewed in Japan, Mr. Yuji Naka spoke with Next Generation about his experience creating *Nights*.

NG: What games have you been responsible for before?

Mr. Naka: I worked as a producer and engaged in the main programming for *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, *Sonic The Hedgehog 3*, and *Sonic & Knuckles*. My role on *Nights* is the same.

NG: Who else from the *Sonic* team is presently working on *Nights*?

Mr. Naka: Basically speaking, the entire staff of our *Sonic* team is currently working on the development of *Nights*.

NG: Is *Nights* your first 32-bit game?

Mr. Naka: Yes.

NG: When did you start developing *Nights*?

Mr. Naka: I started to learn Saturn game design in the summer of 1994 and actually started development of *Nights* in spring '95.

NG: What is the story behind *Nights*?

Mr. Naka: A boy named Elliot, and a girl named Clarise, have strayed off into the dreamland Nightopia. In this world, the two young characters with the help of *Nights* from their dreams, will fight an evil ruler whose name is Nightmare.

NG: How important to the game's success is the design of the characters?

Mr. Naka: In order to design a commercially successful game, we feel that it's not enough to simply make a game where the main character is liked by the majority of users or where the character also plays a role as a communicator in completing the game without difficulty. What we aim to do in this game is to propose something revolutionary in our existing cultures through the use of these characters and also by ignoring the normal game design concept.

NG: Flying is a huge part of the game, why do you think it will be fun for users?

Mr. Naka: When one dreams of flying in the sky like a bird, the sensation is without exception. We wish to make this dream come true for the users. That is the fundamental design concept of *Nights*.

Thus, a completely new type of game was created where users can enjoy a refreshing feeling when flying in the air and also can have desires of repeating the game. In addition, the game has a new timing factor. What we intend primarily in this game is to create a game with better replay value and short playing time but still enjoyable for every level of player.

NG: Would *Nights* have been possible on a 16-bit platform?

Mr. Naka: No. To create a refreshing feeling of flying in the air, the capacity of the Sega Saturn was indispensable.

NG: Why? Other than improved graphics, what can a 32-bit game offer a gameplayer that a 16-bit game can't?

Mr. Naka: We hope that we can fully use the capacity of Saturn to express its hidden ability and give a "dream" to our users. In this game, we created a new type of refreshing gameplay feeling and pad control feeling, but we would say there is still a lot of potential left in Saturn's capacity.

NG: What features do you think made *Sonic the Hedgehog* on Genesis such a success?

Mr. Naka: We think it was a combination of three independent features. First, epoch-making, high-speed scrolling technology. Second, the creation of charming characters and construction of an original game world. And third, level design that successfully worked to provide a refreshing feeling.

NG: Have you tried to incorporate these same features into *Nights*?



The lead programmer and level designer of the *Sonic* series talks about his new title, *Nights*

Mr. Naka: Although the method of expression is different, we think our stance in game design, namely, making a game to please our users, is unchanged.

NG: Do you believe that gameplayers are older now than when you made *Sonic the Hedgehog*? If so, what have you done to make *Nights* appeal to an older audience?

Mr. Naka: No. Our target remains a wide range of users. For women and younger players, we will give the pleasure of just clearing the game, and for older players, the replay value is given priority.

NG: Is *Nights* played in a true 3D world?

Mr. Naka: The world of our *Nights* is a wholly

"True 3D World." However, if all the stages have 3D space, the playability would become harder and game difficulty level might rise.

So in order to avoid such weak points, we have made the game so that every player can fly in the air without difficulty.

NG: What difficulties have you encountered in moving from designing games in 2D to 3D?

Mr. Naka: Through the process of transferring from 2D to 3D, our game design stance has changed considerably. Naturally, we initially had continuous difficulties when we were designing the character personalities, game world, the difference of distances and for controlling playability, etc. As a matter of fact, I cannot begin to count the obstacles we've had! But our desire to create a new 3D game overcame those difficulties.

NG: The Saturn game controller is basically a traditional videogame directional pad, which was designed for the manipulation of game characters in 2D space. Does this make it more difficult for you to design a game that's as easy to play as *Sonic the Hedgehog* was?

Mr. Naka: It is true that the present pad is originally designed to play 2D games. We think the pad must also be evolved parallel to the evolution of games in the future. That's the reason we started to develop a new controller for *Nights*.

NG: What have been the biggest problems in the development of *Nights*?

Mr. Naka: The biggest problem was how to create play feeling, namely, playability.

What we try to attain in this respect is "smooth flying and comfortable play feeling." But we could not get them at a satisfactory level with the present Saturn pad. After combining all efforts by the entire staff, we developed the analog pad for this game. And so, as it turns out, the biggest difficulty has become a charm for *Nights*.

NG: Does *Nights* use any of the Saturn libraries developed by AM2 and AM3?

Mr. Naka: To a very limited extent, we did use some of the libraries. But for the most part, everything is original and by our *Sonic* team.

NG: How do you feel about *Nights* being directly compared to Shigeru Miyamoto's *Super Mario 64* on Nintendo 64?

Mr. Naka: *Mario* by Mr. Miyamoto is a game to be expected. However, there is a different stance taken in the 3D action between *Nights* and *Mario*, so we think that it is difficult to make a direct comparison. *Nights* is an entirely different game from *Sonic* or *Mario*.

NG: Do you feel that *Nights* can have the same impact on Saturn that *Sonic the Hedgehog* had on Genesis?

Mr. Naka: We are now endeavoring to attain this goal so that *Nights* can have greater impact on the Sega Saturn.

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Crash Bandicoot



Yup, it's a bandicoot — and if you ever doubted that videogame designers were running out of mammals, Crash pretty much confirms it

| | |
|---------------|------------------------------------|
| Format: | PlayStation |
| Publisher: | Sony Computer Entertainment |
| Developer: | Naughty Dog |
| Release Date: | fall |
| Origin: | U.S. |

Bandicoots are a family of small marsupials indigenous to Australia, Tasmania, and New Guinea

Nintendo has *Mario*, Sega has *Sonic*, but Sony has yet to find a defining character to associate with its hardware. It could be argued that in an era of massive cross-licensing and a rapidly aging games market, mascot characters aren't needed anymore. But that's not going to stop Sony from trying.

Enter one *Crash Bandicoot*. Bandicoots, for those who aren't familiar with them, are a family (Peramelidae) of small marsupials indigenous to Australia, Tasmania, and New Guinea (it's also the name of an unrelated species of large rat that lives in southern Asia, genus *Bandicota*, whom the natives enjoy literally kicking out of their huts, but that's not important right now).

The team at Naughty Dog, headed by cofounder Jason Rubin, has jumped hip deep into a character-based game. "We realized right off that character-

The march of miscellaneous mammal mascots continues as Naughty Dog and Sony Interactive find yet another marsupial to wave the company flag



While the game clearly offers no new concepts (Crash defeats enemies by, you guessed it, jumping on their heads), the design is still excellent

based action games have had some of the best designers in the industry," Rubin says. "So we said, 'How do you go up against Miyamoto if you don't have Miyamoto?' The answer is that you have literally hundreds of people play it and tell you what they think is wrong, and you compile their opinions and come up with, we hope, what Miyamoto comes up with on his own [laughs]."

The mechanics are familiar: Crash attacks enemies by doing a kind of whirlwind spin, and collects apples instead of rings or coins. Having spent the time, however, to refine and perfect the game graphics and control, the design team is confident that the gameplay will stack up with the best. Rubin continues: "For the first time on a lot of these 3D systems, [a game has had] a full production cycle.



Crash can also resort to (close your ears *Sonic*) a super spin attack



The game's mix of predrawn backgrounds and realtime 3D graphics strays from "pure" 3D titles like *Mario 64* and *Nights*, but certainly looks as good as anything we've seen

The game mechanics are somewhat similar to *Panzer Dragoon*, in that the character has complete freedom of movement within a predefined course

"When we started *Crash*, a lot of the titles that are now on the shelf had just started, too, and they've already been out for months. And that's not because we were slow about this. We've just been taking the time that, classically, games have taken to make. We haven't rushed to market just to have something on the shelf."

Crash didn't begin life as a Sony product, but the results got their attention. Originally slated as a release through Universal Interactive, the game proved so impressive Sony bought the game outright, purchasing exclusive rights and releasing it as a "first-party" title. The designers have pulled every trick out of the PlayStation bag to make the game as smooth as possible, setting gameplay goals and meeting them regardless.

"We've done a lot of different things, [but] we're not pulling any gimmicks," says Rubin. "We use assembly all over the place to get the maximum out of the machine. At the same time we've used LISP in a lot of places, which is a high-level language, because we found that was the best way to create characters with a high level of intelligence and a wide range of actions in LISP it's very quick and very easy to change the characters' attributes — how they attack, how fast they move, that kind of stuff. And we've created a system, a language of our own, called



"We've been taking the time that, classically, games have taken to make. We haven't rushed to market"

Jason Rubin, Naughty Dog

GHOU, which is a compiled LISP for the characters' behavior."

This approach extends even to finding ways around traditional PlayStation limits, like draw-in. Says Rubin, "Oh yeah, we call that 'The Gnome Problem' — it looks like there are little gnomes building things on the horizon as you get there. We decide that there wouldn't be any of that. On some of the levels there's fog in the distance, on others there's nothing occluding, it's just that we have the right polygon count and the ability to go all the way to the horizon, and you don't ever see the world being built."



Does Crash have the requisite "attitude" to be a corporate mascot?

So is Crash Bandicoot really the next hero to follow in the foot/paw steps of Sonic and Mario? Are game characters born great, or can they have greatness thrust upon them? Only time will tell.

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The Tasmanian connection is almost litigiously evident, but at least Crash is "Crash" — originally, the character was to be known as "Willy the Wombat"

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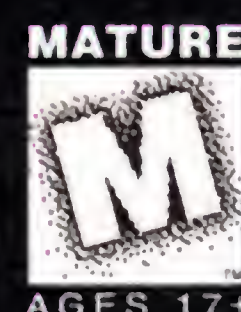


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E.O.

Format: **Saturn**

Publisher: **Warp**

Developer: **Warp**

Release Date: **fall**

Origin: **Japan**

The creators (and heroine) of *D* return with a new story, different setting, and vastly improved game mechanics



Warp's perennial heroine, Laura Louis, is back for a new adventure in a very different time, a very different place, and a new hairstyle



After creating a large following with *D no Shokutaku* last year, Warp is finally ready to release a follow-up. Originally slated for

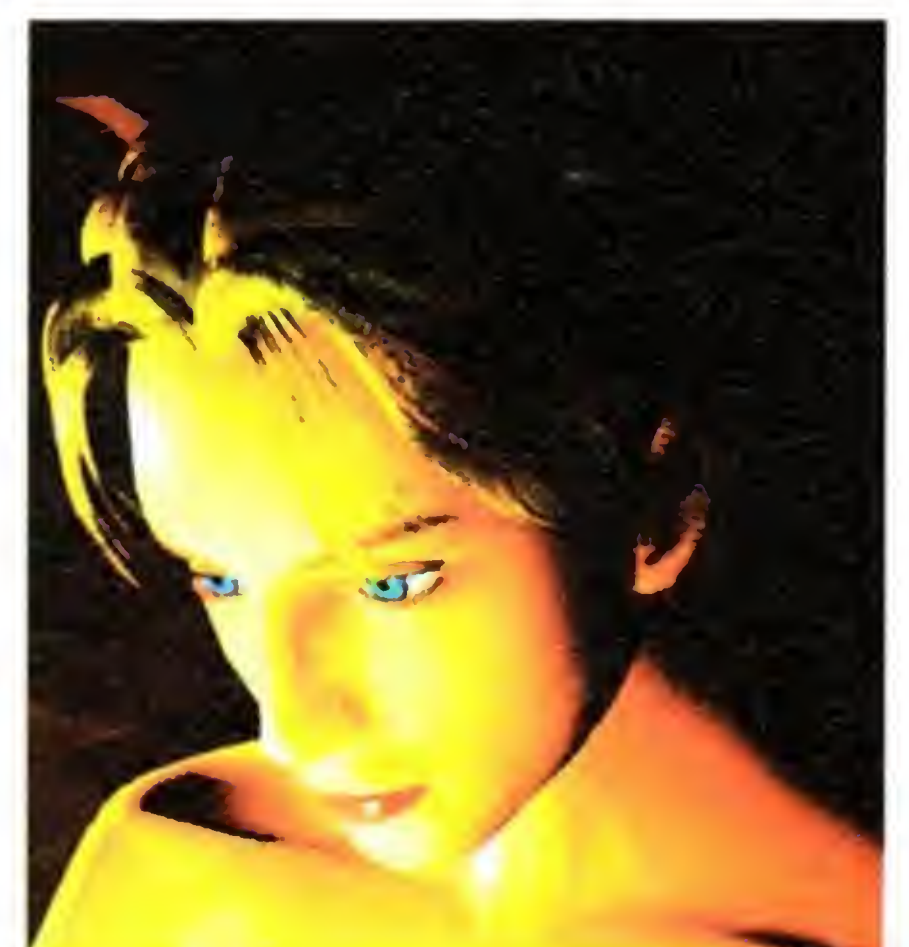
release on PlayStation in early '96, Warp's president, Kenji Eno, publicly broke with SCE Japan last March at the PlayStation Expo in Tokyo, claiming that Sony's "restrictive" policies (only a fixed number of units could be shipped, and marketing had to be approved by SCE) were making the continued relationship impossible. Contrary to some reports, however, there are still tentative plans to release the game on both formats in the US and Europe, since SCE policies vary in these areas.

So what's all the hubbub about? *EO* (or *Enemy Zero* as it will be called

outside Japan), is another graphic adventure starring *D*'s Laura Louis. However, *EO* shouldn't be construed as a direct sequel — it is, in fact, set in a very different time and place. It just happens to use the same character.

In the far future, on a space station with four towers (named Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter), Laura is talking with her boyfriend over the videophone when she sees him viciously killed by something she couldn't see, and soon, the entire station is being overrun with invisible monsters. In a unique and intriguing twist of gameplay, the only way to detect the critters is through listening very closely, and Laura dons a special earplug that makes a different sound depending on where the monsters are coming from, hopefully enabling the player to locate and kill them. The game is divided between two distinct modes of play: a first-person perspective for moving through corridors, and prerendered *D*-style CG screens for searching rooms and locating objects.

Warp has shown it can design a game with a creepy atmosphere and involving characters; and the only flaws in *D* were the lethargic pace and short running time. But the addition of action elements to *EO* should help the pace, and the title is projected to take up a total of four CDs. Warp fans have much to look forward to.



Warp's first game, *D*, was all the more impressive for having been modeled on Amiga 4000's. However, the company's fortunes have since enabled them to upgrade to SGI workstations

Warp has shown it can design a game with a creepy atmosphere and involving characters



"Who goes there?" Laura's space station has been infested by creatures which can only be located by sound, providing a unique twist of gameplay

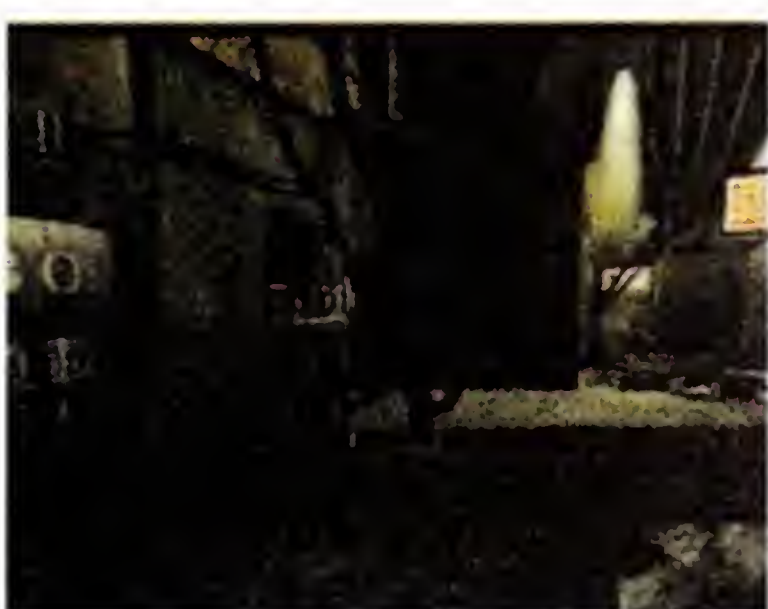
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Kowloon's Gate



Welcome to Hong Kong 1997. Everyone is a citizen of China again, and ancient ghost castles are popping out of the ground — ain't life grand?



Movement is handled *Myst*-style, with first-person sequences streaming off the CD



Character interaction takes place on static screens, but much of the game is also set in Kowloon's Net, a computer network linking the whole city

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **Sony Music Corporation**

Developer: **Sony Music Corporation**

Release Date: **fall**

Origin: **Japan**

One of the most visually impressive games to hit the PlayStation yet, *Kowloon's Gate* is set in Hong Kong in 1997, just after the island

province has been returned to China. The transition itself would be enough to cause chaos, but things get even stranger when an ancient castle suddenly appears in the heart of the city. Mysterious creatures have been spotted in the fog surrounding the castle, and the whole island is in an

Sony of Japan's first in-house title uses extensive CG graphics to show you Hong Kong like it's never been shown before

uproar. In the Kowloon district, not far from where the castle stands, a young woman named Shao Hei and her oddball collection of friends and companions decide they need to get to the bottom of things.

This is SMC's first in-house game, and on a technical level it represents a very ambitious effort. Rather than use a hybrid, half-prerendered, half-polygon mix like *Alone in the Dark* or *Resident Evil*, most of the gameplay in *Kowloon's Gate* relies entirely on prerendered CG graphics. The entire cast of characters, plus the whole city of Hong Kong, large sections of the castle, and the mysterious parallel universe that's behind the strange goings-on, have been meticulously modeled using Microsoft's *Softimage*. The amount of CG graphics is so immense, the game will be released on three full CDs.

A small ying-yang symbol at the bottom of the screen shows the possible directions the player can go from his or her present location, and in a style similar to Warp's *D no Shokutaku*, players move from place to place through first-person, animated walking sequences read off the CD. To avoid nightmare loading times, SMC has developed a new process, making full use of PlayStation's built-in JPEG decompression routines.

In the middle portion, as Shao Hei makes her way into the castle itself, play switches to a first-person 3D style, something SMC has pulled off with some success before while working in collaboration with Genki to produce *Kileak: The Blood*. The intro sequence, cut- and game-screens we've seen have been breathtaking. A little dark perhaps, but they fit the game's mood and style. The character design is first rate, blending high-tech, low-tech, and enough fantasy elements to be fresh and eye-catching. Definitely a looker.



Character designs are intricate, detailed, and completely off the wall. Will anyone living in Hong Kong in '97 really look anything like this?

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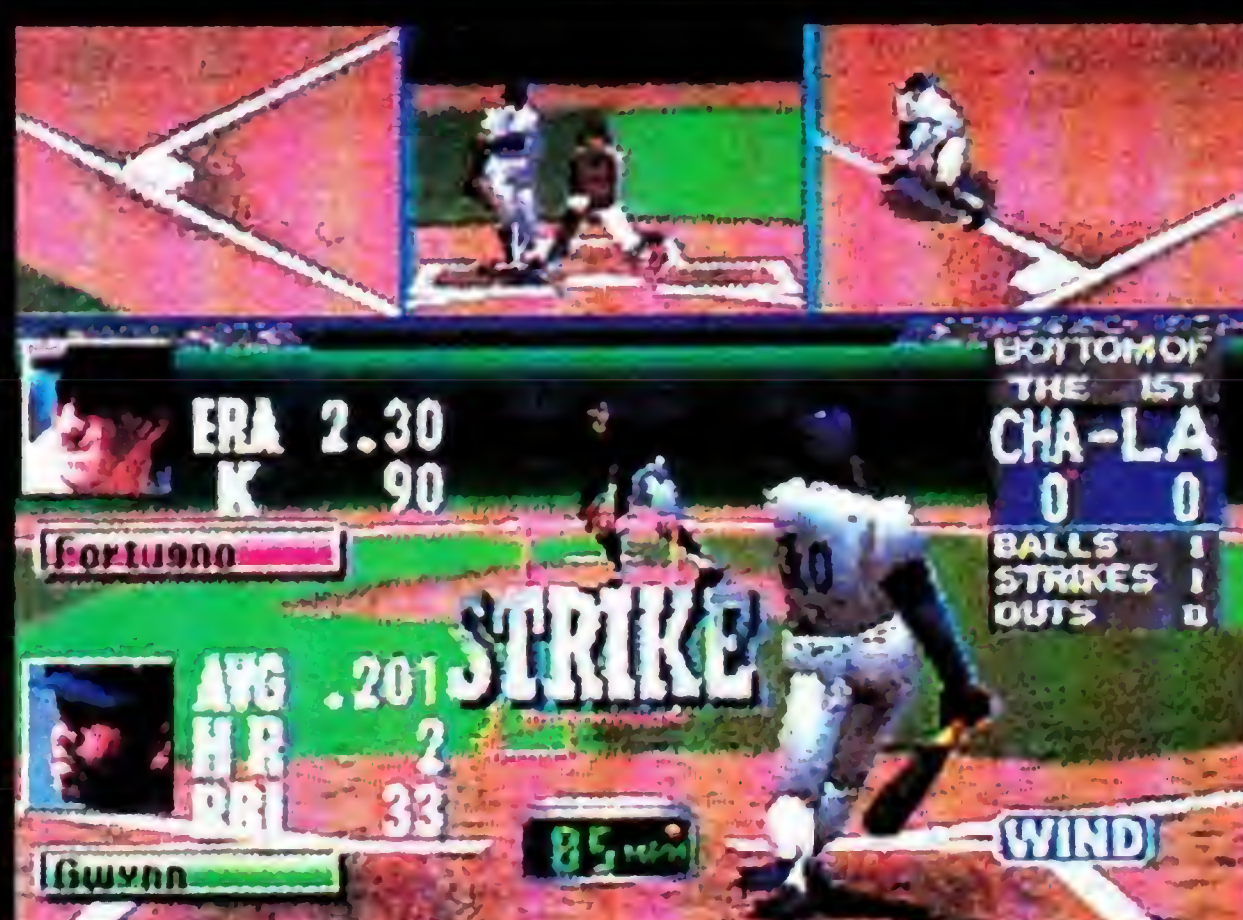
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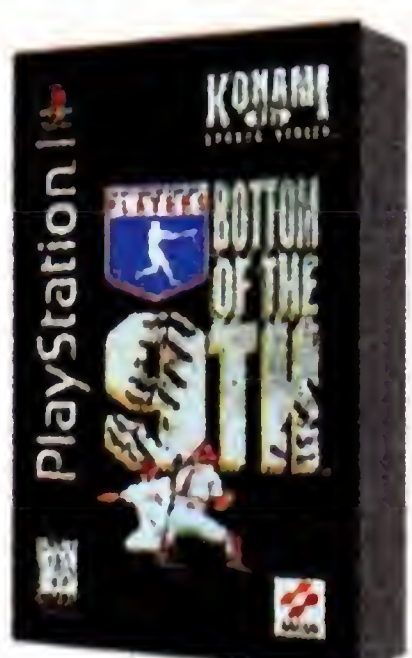


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Rave Racer



Namco's conversion of coin-op hit, *Rave Racer*, could redefine graphics for the PC

Thanks to VideoLogic's PowerVR accelerator and Namco, the PC could be set to accelerate past the consoles never to look back



The PowerVR's TSP technology has enabled some beautifully texture-mapped locales to be included in the *Rave Racer* conversion. This game is a far cry from the blocky, pixel mosaic that PC users have come to expect from 3D games

***Rave Racer* makes full use of PowerVR's revolutionary texture and shading processor**

Format: **PC (plus PowerVR)**

Publisher: **Namco**

Developer: **Namco Japan**

Release Date: **TBA**

Origin: **Japan**

Just a few months ago, the prospect of a PC *Rave Racer* conversion was almost unimaginable — at least a fast, visually impressive version of Namco's classic.

Ridge Racer would have been difficult enough, as *Screamer* illustrated with its limited frame rate and sluggish controls. But *Rave Racer*, as a sequel to Namco's seminal racing title (*Ridge Racer Revolution* was more of an update), presents an additional three tracks and improved high-resolution textures — seemingly putting it completely out of reach for PC developers.

Now, however, the PowerVR chipset, developed by VideoLogic and exploited in conjunction with NEC and

Namco, appears to have made a decent port possible. Indeed, if the early demo **Next Generation** has seen is truly indicative of a complete version, *Rave Racer* will be incredible.

Visually, it's clearly ahead of anything else on the PC. *Rave Racer* makes full use of PowerVR's revolutionary texture and shading processor (especially its anti-aliasing



The PC *Rave Racer* conversion remains faithful to the coin-op by including all the camera angles from the original's replay mode. This is a good thing



The highly-derivative tunnel sections, familiar to *Ridge Racer* devotees, look particularly impressive — yet they are far from complete. PowerVR's new lighting techniques are still to be implemented. By using these specialized techniques, small, shaded polygons are no longer needed

abilities), to present some beautifully detailed cityscapes and sleek, smoothly-drawn cars. To exhibit just how much of a leap the chip represents, VideoLogic claims *Rave Racer* is handling four times the graphic work of PlayStation *Ridge Racer*. This is more than feasible considering the lack of blocky pixelation, common to PC 3D games that usually have to run in 320x200 to produce anything reasonably swift.

The demo is almost as impressive for what isn't in it, as what is. Namco's personal computer division, which is converting the game to the chipset, has not had time to draft some of the chip's more complex graphic tricks into the title. For

example, so far *Rave Racer* has yet to implement PowerVR's powerful custom lighting techniques, which would do away with the necessity for smaller, memory-consuming polygons in spotlight effects.

Thankfully, the impressively intricate visuals do not compromise the speed of the game. The *Rave Racer* demo is running at 30 fps, and that's in hi-res 640x480 — making for a much more fluid ride than, say, *Screamer* could manage, without the usual loss in graphic quality. But will this frame rate slow down when the game nears completion? Not according to VideoLogic, which



The early PC *Rave Racer* demo that Next Generation played did slow down noticeably when the camera angle switched to the view behind the sleek mobiles



ascertains that the complete version will fun at 30 fps on a Pentium 133.

As for the accuracy of the conversion, few compromises will need to be made when porting from the arcade machine to the PC. Apparently, with the exception of the steering equipment, PowerVR provides most of the specific features of the arcade system, albeit with lower overall polygon-pushing power.

Of course, Microsoft's Direct3D threatens to render all dedicated software support for PC 3D graphics cards irrelevant. Although still delayed, Direct3D's promise of complete compatibility between all PC 3D cards and all software remains compelling. And despite its unarguable quality, Videologic's *Rave Racer* may end up merely as the videogaming world's equivalent of WWII's Maginot Line, with guns bristling and trenches prepared, but for a battle that is destined to be fought on a completely different front.

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The only drawback is that a top-end PC will be required to really bring out the advantages of the chip, and thus the *Rave Racer* conversion



Tracks are often long and straight, which exhibits the Power VR chip's great ability to handle complicated, extensive terrains

ng alphas

Star Gladiator

Capcom, the maker of the some of the world's finest 2D brawlers, brings its first 3D, polygonal fighter to US shores



Weird and funny characters, from pandas and eagles, to raptors, robots, and cone-headed aliens, differentiate this title from the standard fare



Cool throw moves will make the weapon-based fighting riveting fun

While *Virtua Fighter 3* speeds ahead at the forefront of the arcade technology race, smart developers of fighting games aren't second

betting on its credibility, nor are they ignoring its presence. Three-dimensional, polygonal fighting games are here to stay, and if a company intends to do the same, then it has to join the party.

Star Gladiator not only brings the possibility of new fighting techniques, and the clever use of multiple camera angles, but also — with Capcom's entrance into the 3D arena — the application to the 3D world of a fine gaming heritage born of producing many of 2D gaming's finest hours.

Don't expect an unoriginal-looking game, however. The characters we've seen look like they're patrons of the Cantina at *Star Wars'* Mos Eisley; they range from Saturn, a green-skinned alien with a conehead, to Zelkin, a human eagle, to Bilstein, an evil-looking skeleton who wears a new-age shogun battle outfit, to "normal" humans. Each odd character is rendered in Capcom's enjoyable, quirky *anime* design style,

Format: **Arcade**

Publisher: **Capcom**

Developer: **Capcom**

Release Date: **summer**

Origin: **Japan**

which has evolved from the 2D to the 3D world flawlessly.

Fighting is weapon-based, and each fighter has a litany of special attacks, spells, throws, and unusual weapon-based moves. An even more unusual focus will be on characters' abilities to grow in size during the middle of a round. Fighters will also be able to defend and attack making full use of their 3D world, side-stepping and rolling to defend when necessary.

Star Gladiator is based on an arcade board made by Sony (directly equivalent to Namco's System 11 unit), which is essentially the same as a PlayStation, so — unlike with Sega's *Virtua Fighter 3* — a home conversion should be relatively effortless.

Capcom is currently testing and tweaking the title with a view to releasing a custom U.S. version.



Various half-circle arcs make up some of the moves used with this four-button title, a slight departure for Capcom

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Quake

With *Doom*, Id created the game that spawned a thousand imitations. Now the gaming world looks to Id's polygon-based *Quake* to find out if the Texas-based coders are still the best in the business

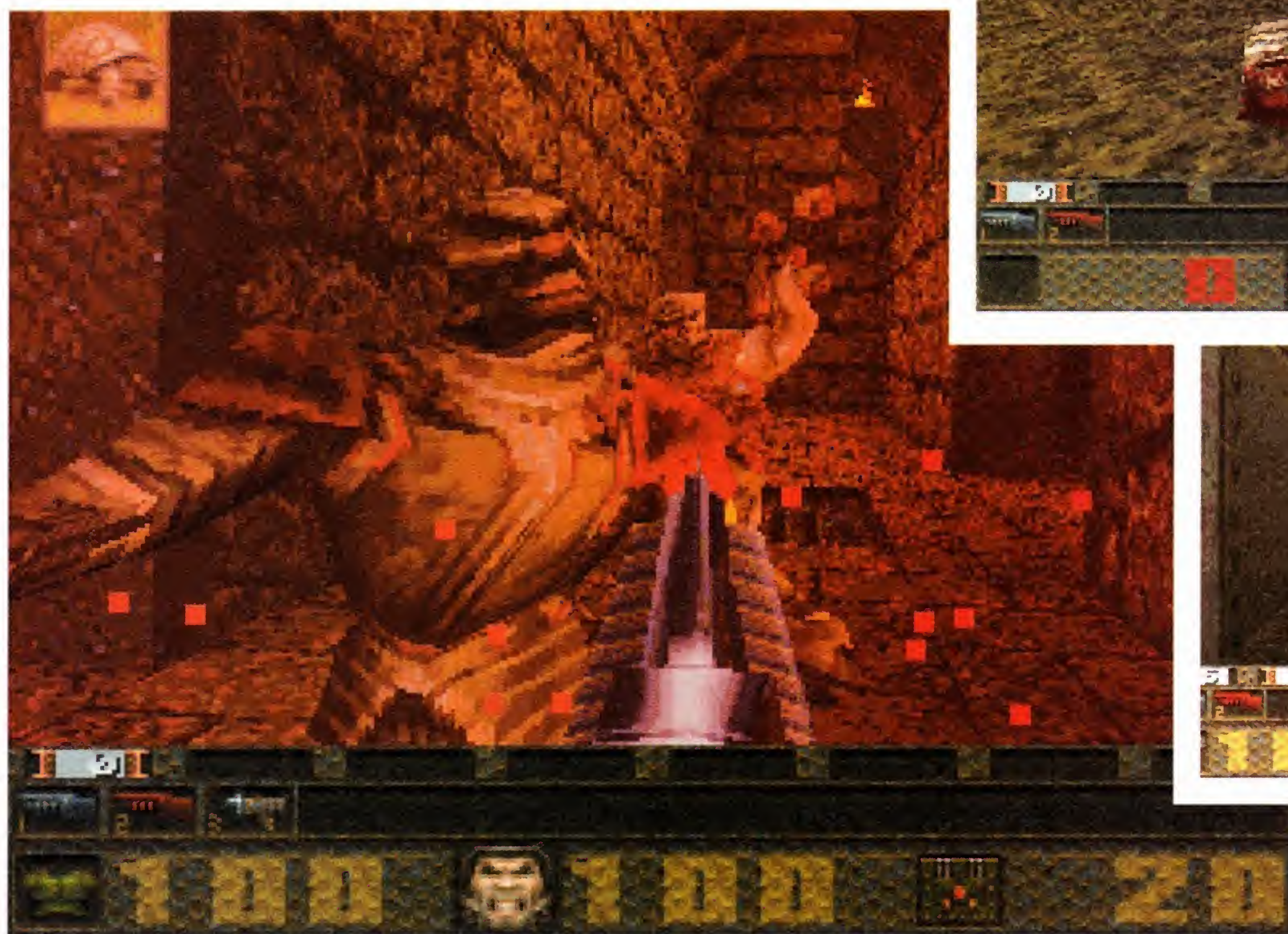
Format: **PC CD-ROM**

Publisher: **GT Interactive**

Developer: **Id Software**

Release Date: **TBA**

Origin: **U.S.**



Character animation is impressive, although movement can look rather unrealistic, especially when a marine runs up or down a staircase. Death animations, however, rock

Will *Quake* offer anything new over its middle-aged predecessors?

When the new hospital PC was delivered in a recent episode of hit TV drama, "ER," what was the first thing to be installed on the hard drive? Medical records? Drug or client information? No — *Doom*.

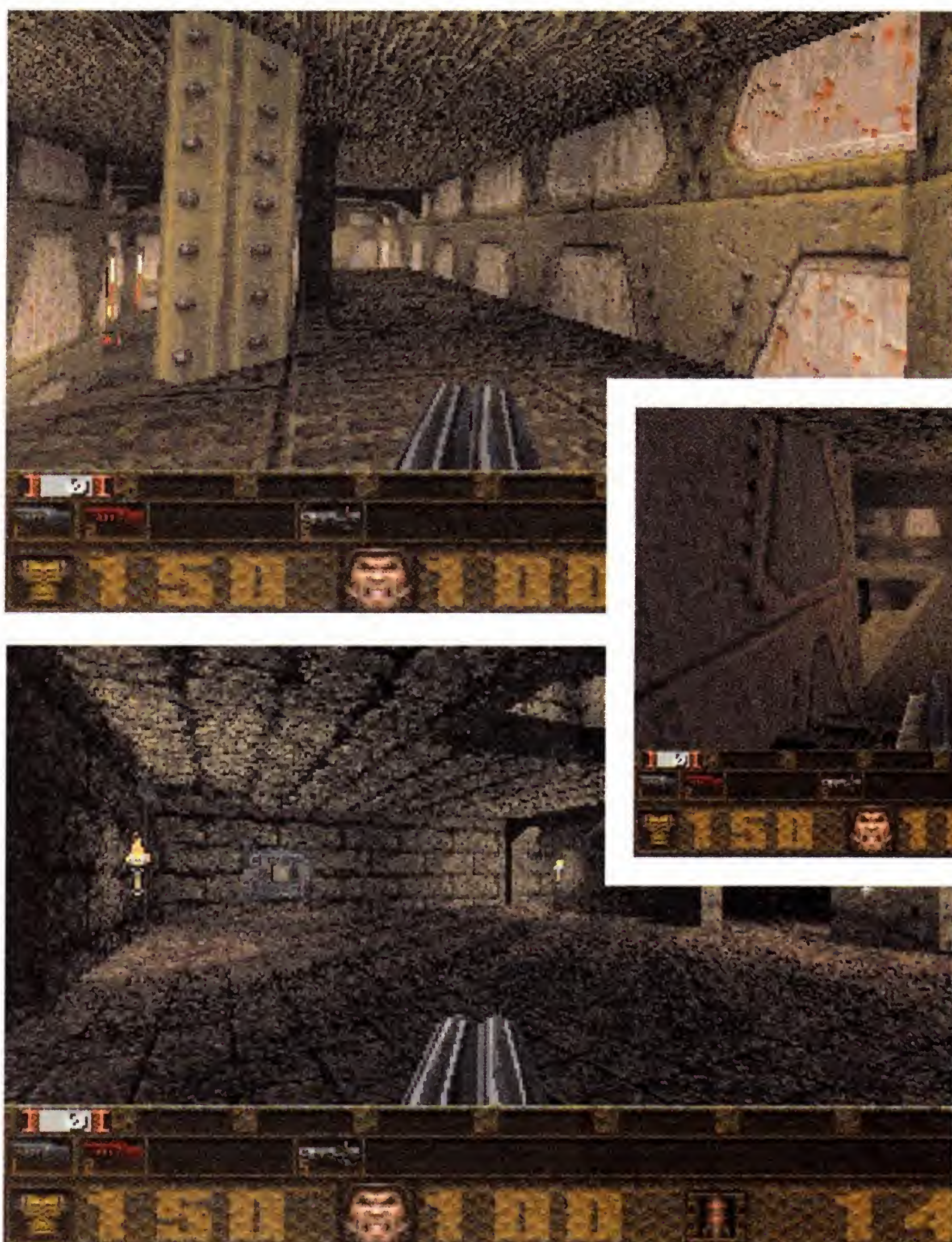
This entry into mainstream culture, equal to a thousand rave reviews in the gaming press, is testament to the legendary status of Id's seminal first-person carnage fest. Although *Doom 2* offered different maps and a few new creatures, it was with the announcement of *Quake* — or, perhaps more

significantly, the new polygon-based, true 3D engine that would run it — that Id promised to really shake up the genre. After a wait that has had the PC press quivering with excitement, a playable test of *Quake* has finally been released. The death-match version is currently doing the rounds on the Internet, giving gamers something to expect from the completed game.

At first glance, the test fails to live up to expectations, looking more like *Doom* with a facelift than anything truly special. Only after extensive play do the new subtleties become clear.

Of course, because there are no enemies in place yet (though a downloadable hack is available, bringing polygonal monsters to the halls), the demo mainly showcases the maps and *Quake's* use of polygons and textures, a major improvement over the blocky old bitmaps of *Doom*. The lighting is further improved by the clever use of texture-mapping around torches and skylights, adding an eerie luminescence to the otherwise dingy settings. Light even reflects off the gun, making the player feel much more involved.

Further accentuating the sense of immersion is the new ability to look up and down, glance around in all directions while moving, and to jump (instead of having to run very fast over chasms). Having said all this, the control method is still not as advanced as *Marathon's* (despite *Quake's* inclusion of a "free-look" feature, enabling players to control the view angle with the mouse). But, in any case, some could argue the added complexity may detract from *Doom's* intuitive control system — which was one of the reasons the original was such a hit.



The new 3D engine's power is evident throughout. Strafing (top) sways the camera, and it is now possible to run under platforms (middle)



When a marine (or other creature, above) is hit by a rocket or grenade, the body flies across the screen or obliterates into shards of slimy flesh

The demo features six of the proposed eight weapons. There's the trusty shotgun, double-barreled shotgun, and rocket launcher from *Doom 2*, as well as a marvelous grenade launcher (grenades shoot out, roll about for a while, then ignite), a mean nail gun and an even meaner chain nail gun. Yet to be seen are the enticingly named lightning gun and chain lightning gun, not to appear until completion.

Despite lacking in-game enemies in one-player mode, the excellent network death match does show off the 3D polygon-based marines. Opponents appear as beefy, well-detailed characters which, unlike *Doom's*, don't pixelate into oblivion when you approach them. Furthermore, when one of the enemy marines looks up or down

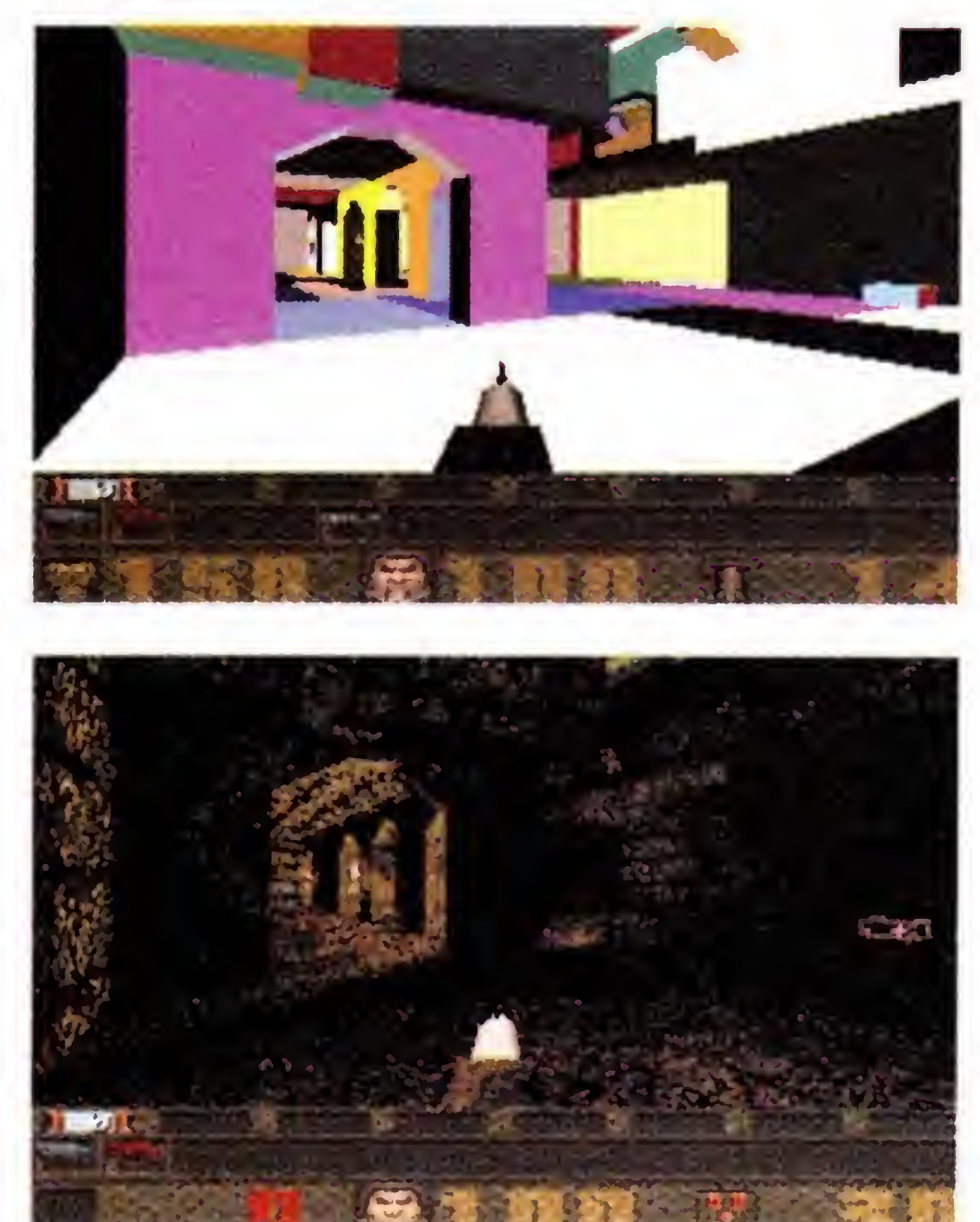
his head moves concurrently — better yet, when he jumps in front of you, your gun follows him up and down.

No doubt *Quake* will be a massive hit, just as there's no doubt the smooth, distinguished

graphics will be universally applauded by the PC world. But will it offer anything new over its middle-aged predecessors, or the continuing slew of copycat titles? Considering Id virtually invented this genre, it is hoped *Quake* will be more than "*Doom* with a better graphics engine."



Quake offers astoundingly atmospheric 3D chambers where standard Doom-esque darkness and gore is mixed with Escher-like architecture



Quake's test version enables the game to be played in rather garish polygons (top). The same scene, except after the texture mapping has been added (bottom)

ng alphas

Bubsy 3D

Accolade's latest stab at mascot gaming dives into a 3D world of immense proportions and cartoon sensibilities

Format: **Saturn, PlayStation**

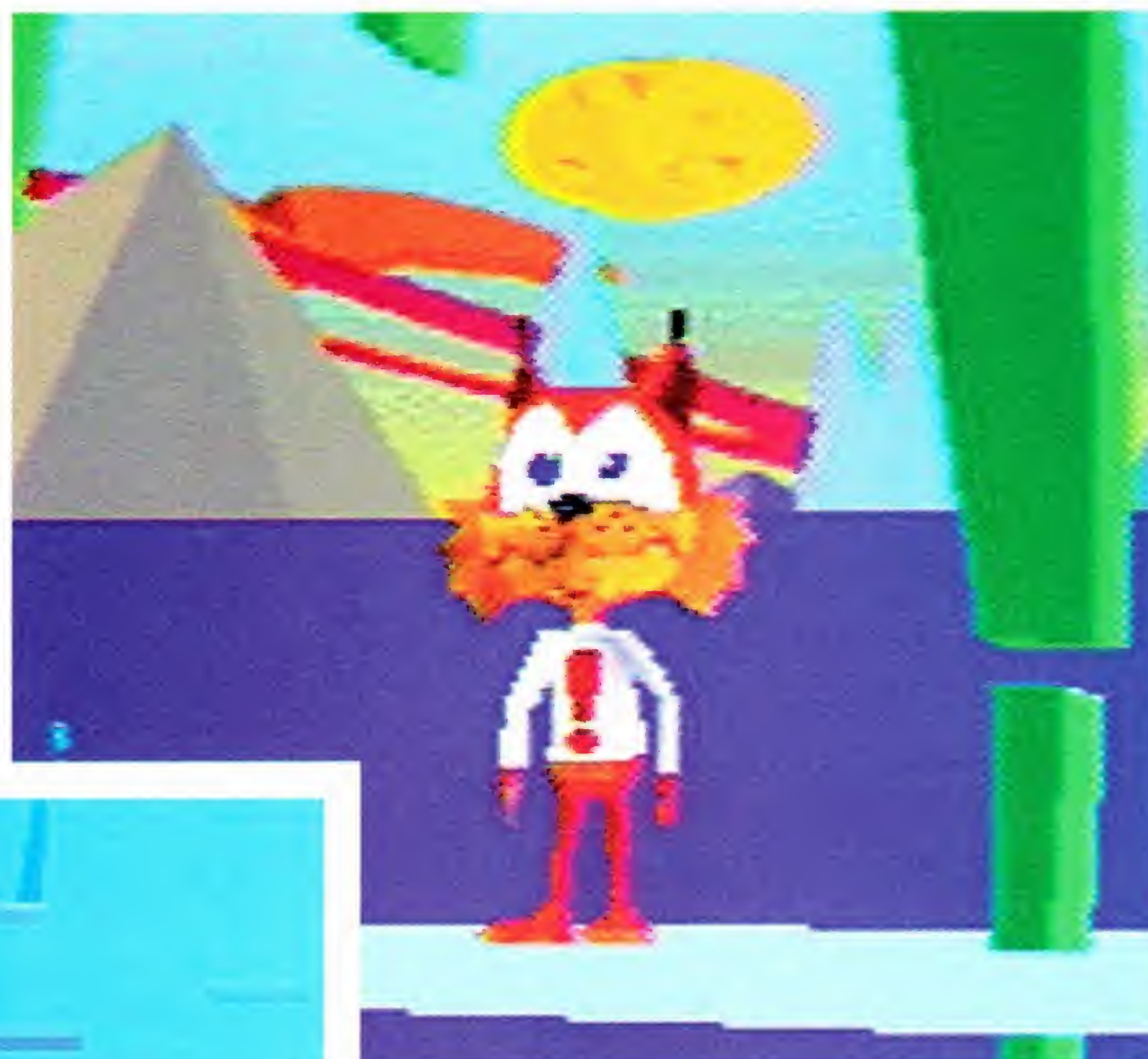
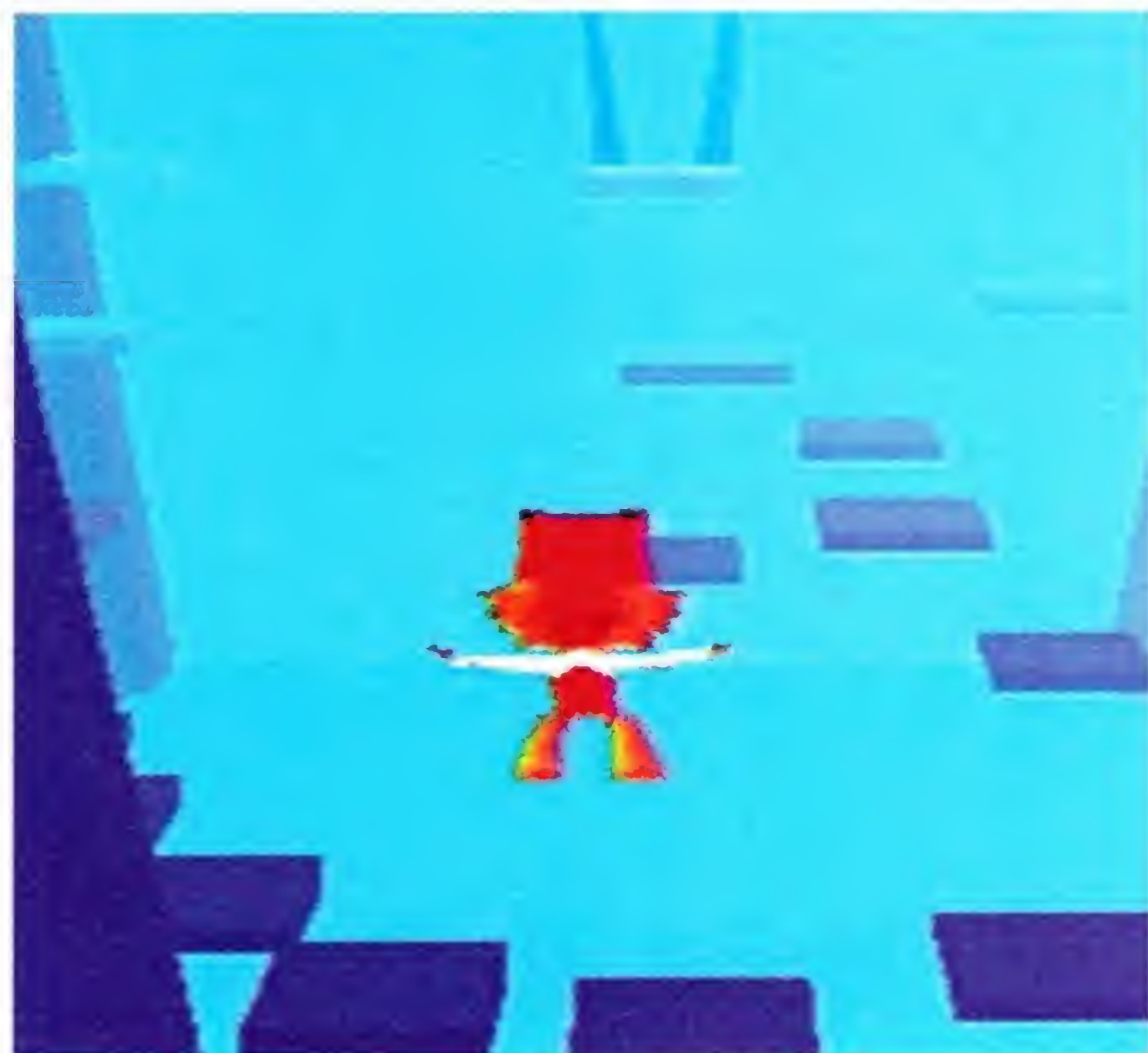
Publisher: **Accolade**

Developer: **Eidetic**

Release Date: **fall**

Origin: **U.S.**

The simplistic graphic style of *Bubsy 3D* not only works to create a stylized world, but also enables greater processor efficiency



No longer is Bubsy confined to running from left to right and hopping on enemies' heads

In a world where videogame mascots like Mario and Sonic so often (excuse the pun) hog the limelight, it's occasionally nice to discover another mascot with heart. Bubsy may not have had the right stuff as a 2D platformer, but in his new 3D world, this "bobcat with an attitude" has come to life in dramatic fashion. No longer is he confined to running left to right and hopping on enemies' heads and trying to prove that he too is worthy of super stardom. This time around, Bubsy is a trailblazer eager to set a few standards of his own.

Driven by Mike Berlyn (of *Zork* fame) and Mark Blank, the creator of the original *Bubsy*, the development team, Eidetic, started work on *Bubsy*

3D more than a year and a half ago. Berlyn and Blank created a gigantic world filled with simplistic shapes, wacky environments, twisted scenarios, and lovable but pesky enemies, and then let Bubsy loose in it to make a mockery of the entire place.



Working your way through the maze's valleys and finding secret routes is much of the fun

The game is still based on all the simple principles that make platform games so great, but now the action is coming at you from every direction and Bubsy, in turn, can react accordingly.

The game designers, aware of current console limitations, have opted to develop the game using flat shaded polygons instead of textured polygons, which puts less of a demand on the hardware's geometry engines, and inevitably decreases draw-in.

Another interesting feature is the game's use of an event-triggered soundtrack. Straying from the traditionally generic musical overlay, *Bubsy 3D* supplies music and sound effects that change according to what's going on in the game at the time.

Overall, each of these elements adds up to what looks like step one in establishing a new standard in the platform action genre.



The prerendered death scenes add a great deal to the humor of *Bubsy 3D*

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The producers of one of the most successful Genesis games, *X-Men: Clone Wars*, introduce their first 32-bit title

Sirens

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **TBA**

Developer: **Caps Software**

Release Date: **fall**

Origin: **U.S.**

The emphasis is as much on adventure as action, and the designers are shooting for a game that's more like *Metroid* than *Contra*



Until now, Caps Software has been known for its 16-bit Genesis titles, including *X-Men 2: Clone Wars*, and *Taz 2*. *Sirens* is its first 32-bit title, and although it doesn't stray too far from Caps' side-scrolling roots, it does stretch the form.

As in *Skeleton Warriors*, the traditional side-on view has been upgraded by modeling the paths and backgrounds in texture-mapped polygons and by enabling travel "into" and "out of" the screen. The emphasis is as much on adventure as action, and the



Everything the player's character does has a lasting effect on the game, which is one of the more unusual and appealing elements to *Sirens*

designers are shooting for a game that's more like *Metroid* than *Contra*.

However, *Sirens'* strongest card is in its fine, detailed character and world design. "I fell asleep listening to some music a few years ago," says Steve Ross, lead designer on the project. "And I had this incredibly detailed, incredibly vivid dream about this really strange world. I woke up and wrote it down. I've been just sitting on it. And now we get to do it on PS-X, which is really cool..."

The story involves Reive Larson, who's pulled from 21st century Los Angeles into a bizarre parallel world by unknown forces. After finding a set of datacubes left behind by a previous unlucky captive, he discovers that the world's ecological balance has been thrown completely out of balance, and he must work to restore that balance.

This emphasis on real-world environmental dynamics is one of the designers' goals as well. "We're really excited about creating a world that makes sense," Ross adds. "Not like you're in the usual videogame world where all the creatures are against you for no reason."



Aren't these two just the kind of folks you want over for dinner?



"If you kill something, you could come back later and find some bad-ass monster sitting there eating the carcass," says Steve Ross, lead designer

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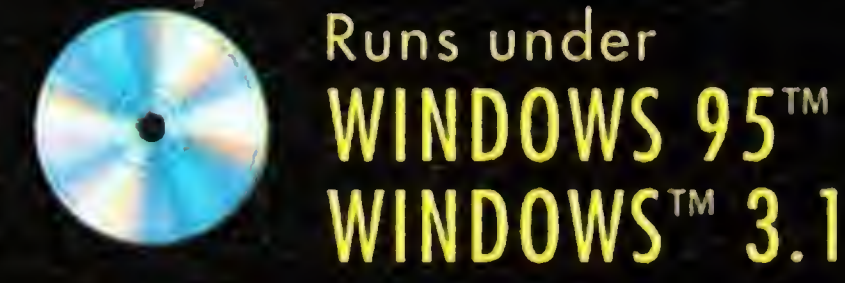


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Sonic X-Treme

Sega's venerable mascot returns for the next-generation system wars, fully polygonal and ready to rumble



Vaguely mechanical enemies, checkerboard play fields, and rings floating everywhere — *X-Treme* looks like a *Sonic* game to us

Format: **Saturn, Genesis**

Publisher: **Sega**

Developer: **Sega Technical Institute**

Release Date: **winter**

Origin: **U.S.**

In keeping with Sega's desire to keep the character fresh, the team plans to give Sonic new, "cool" things to do, like surf and bungee jump

After a year's hiatus and several years of having to put up with an increasingly ambitious and limelight-stealing (or should that be "hogging"?) set of supporting character side-kicks, the world's fastest hedgehog is set to make his break into the brave new world of 3D. Twice.

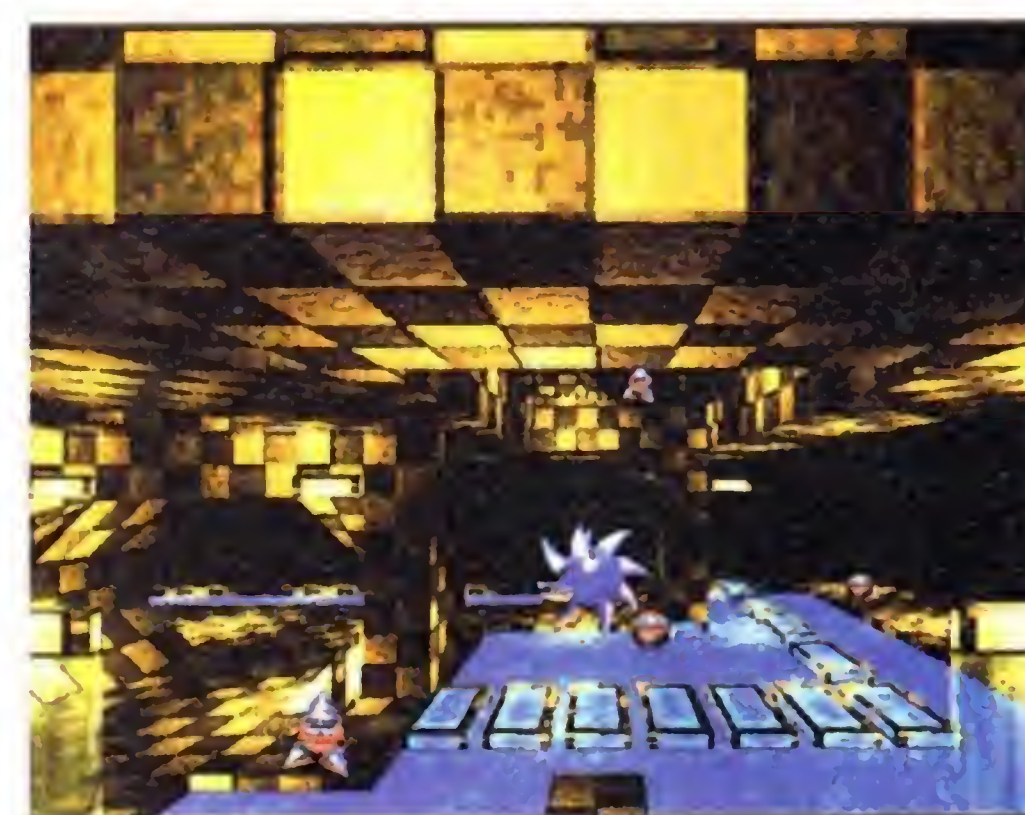
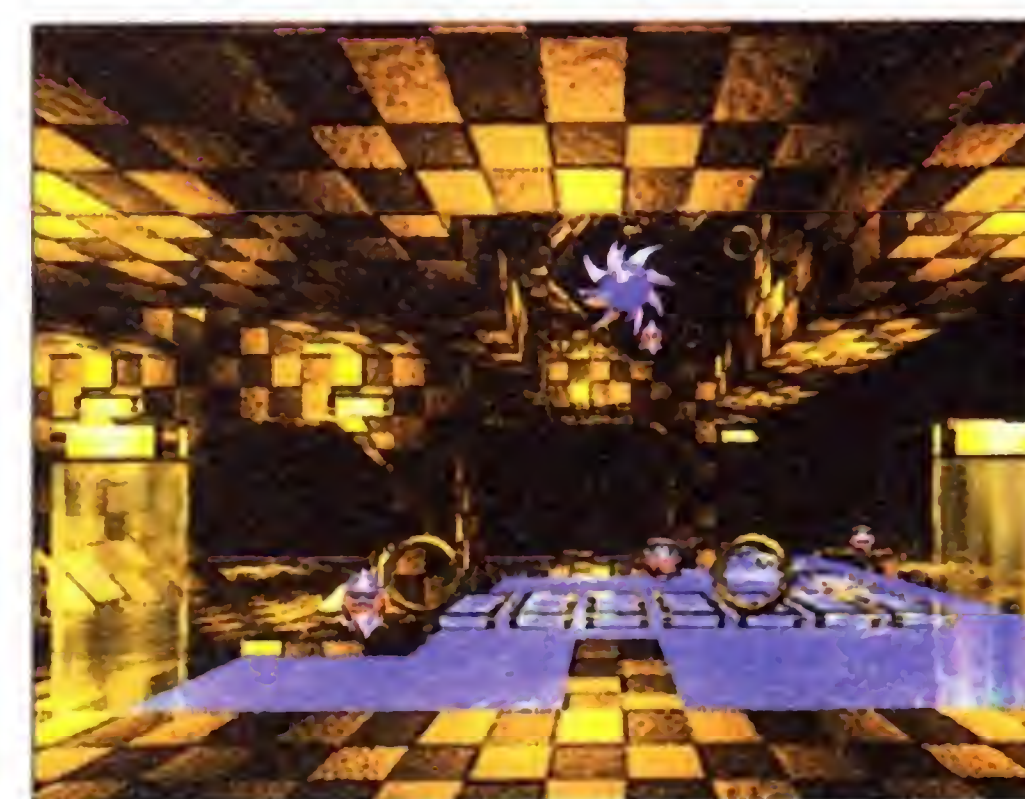
Yup, there are two new *Sonic* games planned, one for Saturn and one for Genesis. What is surprising is that both games mark a departure from the safety of the 2D side-scrolling world (a genre which, with some justification, Sonic must regard as "home turf"). *Sonic X-Treme* (working title) for Saturn is a fully 3D effort — something everyone expected — whereas *Sonic Blast* for Genesis favors a much simpler, isometric, 3D perspective.



Sonic Blast for Genesis features prerendered backgrounds and sprites. At press time, the game was barely at the 10% completion mark, and many of the new elements and features are incomplete or simply not in place. It seems clear, however, from the screen-shots and conversations with the game's developers (who seem unnaturally busy) that the overhaul is going well.

The plan is for seven levels, with two acts and a boss each, plus the appearance of at least some of the series' traditional supporting characters (Tails, Knuckles, et al.). The 3/4 perspective should enable the player to make use of Sonic's traditional skills in new ways, resulting in a game that plays like a more action-oriented version of *Landstalker* — one of the brighter spots in Genesis' history.

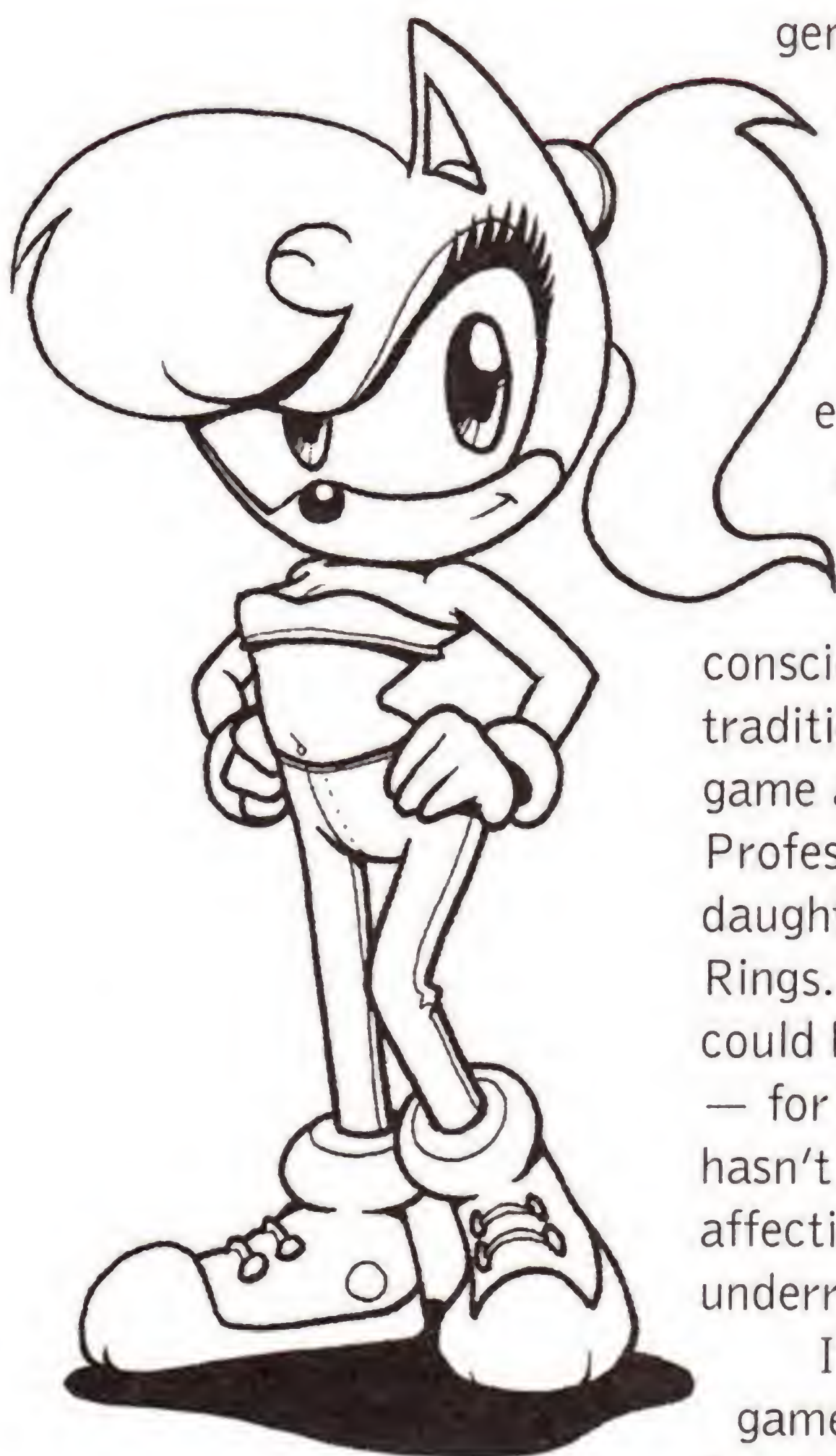
Saturn owners, however, will be far more interested in *Sonic X-Treme* — the Sega team's purest stab at bringing Sonic into the next



The *X-Treme* team has striven to include as many traditional *Sonic* elements as possible, while updating gameplay for a 3D world



Conceptual art for other *X-Treme* levels shows a glossiness and beauty that forms a logical extension of the partially rendered zones of *Sonic 3*



generation of games, and an undisguised answer to Nintendo's imminent *Mario 64*.

The game moves Sonic into a totally 3D environment, without abandoning the gameplay elements that has made the series a consumer favorite. This time around, Robotnik is after the six Rings of Order — a self-conscious break with the series' traditional six Chaos Emeralds. The game also introduces new characters: Professor Gazebo Boobowski and his daughter, Tiara, keepers of the Six Rings. Early sketches of Tiara imply she could be a love interest (sure, she's cute — for a hedgehog) for our hero, who hasn't had a sniff since the overbearing affections of Rosy the Hedgehog in the underrated *Sonic CD*.

It's in the new level design and gameplay approach, however, that the Sega Institute is doing its best work. Unlike *Bug!*, players aren't constrained

to a series of tracks, but are free to move anywhere in 3D. Each level is composed of huge, multistory constructions, which include 3D versions of the traditional hills, loops, ramps, etc. In fact, the screen-shots and conceptual art seen so far look like traditional *Sonic* play fields projected into space.

New powers include a midair version of the Spin Dash, and the ability to not only collect rings, but throw them (an interesting twist, since holding onto rings has always been, and still is, one of Sonic's goals). In keeping with Sega's desire to keep the character fresh, however, it plans to give him new, "cool" things to do, like surf and bungee jump.

There's little doubt that *Sonic* was instrumental in Sega's drive to match Nintendo in the 16-bit era. Can Sega's mascot give the Italian competitor a run for his money (no coin pun intended) a second time around? Sega certainly hopes so.

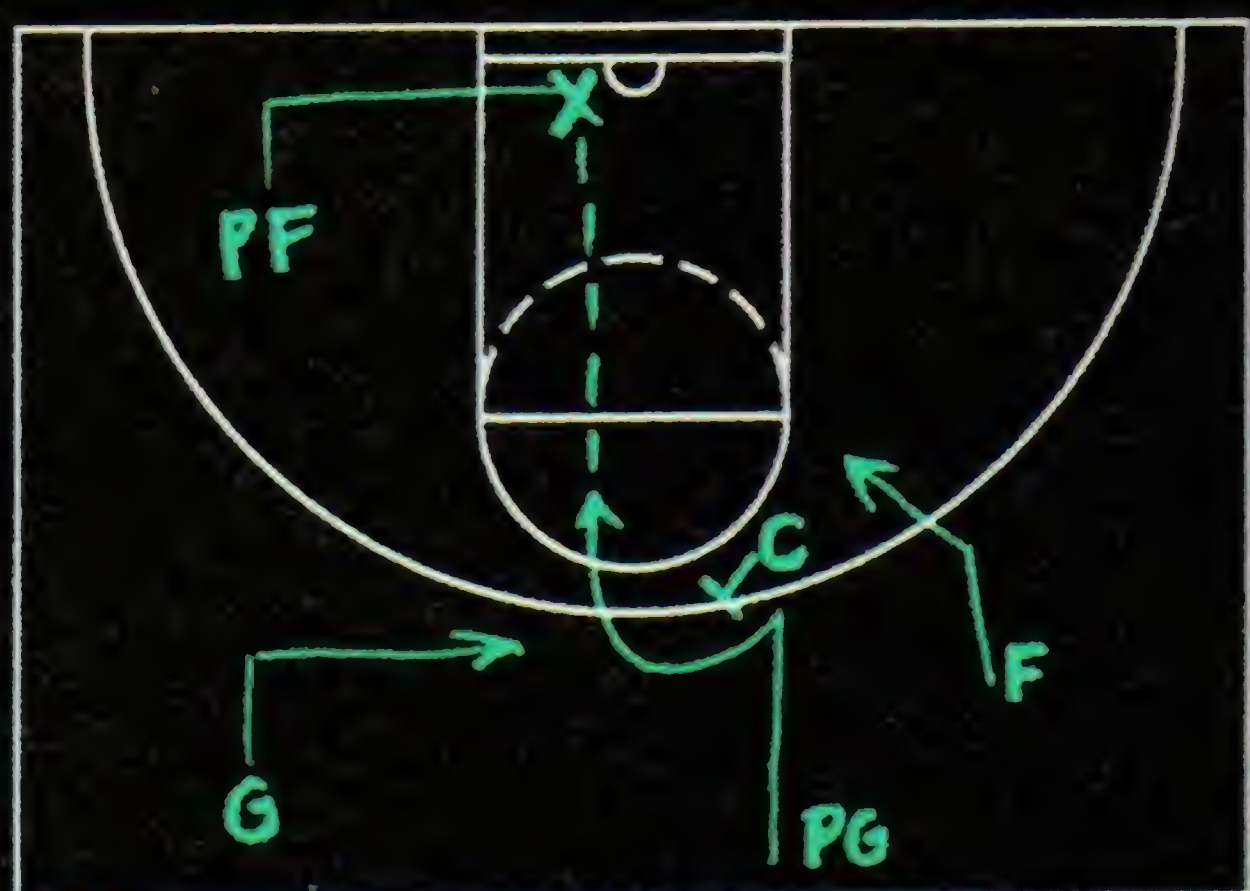


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Sonic Blast for Genesis also moves Sonic away from his side-scrolling roots. At one point he even gets a flock of wacky birds to follow him around

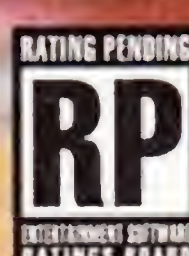
You set the pick for Magic, who rolls to the top of the key. As the defender rotates to cut off the lane, Magic lofts a pass to the wide open power forward for the alley-oop jam.



Sometimes it's the smallest details—Jams off the glass, Defensive thunder swats, Reverse dunks, and Play-by-play commentary, that separate hoops from lawn bowling.



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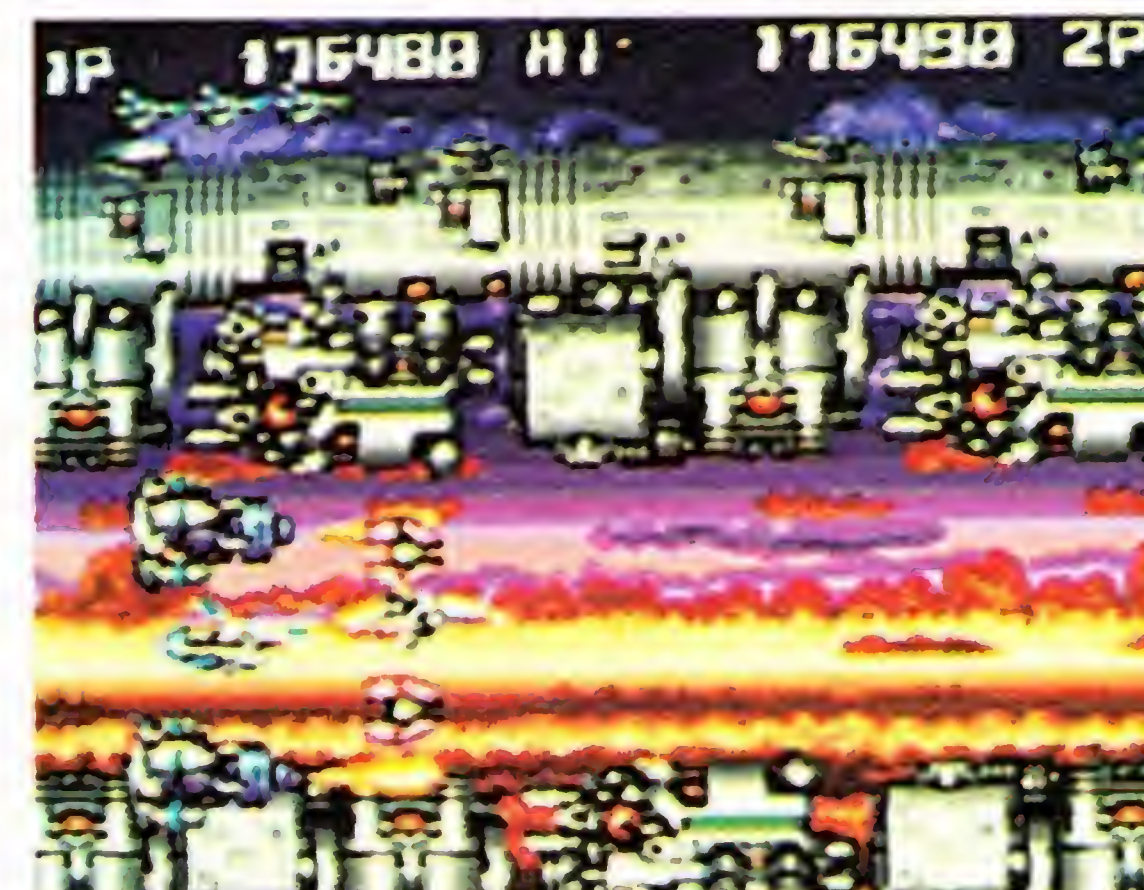
After a few rocky years in the 16-bit wilderness, the premier Japanese software company Konami has been given the 32-bit kiss of life



ince its formation on March 21, 1969, Konami Co., Ltd. has enjoyed a position which most other Japanese-

based entertainment companies can only dream of. Entering the videogame market at around the same time as its Japanese peers, Namco and Taito, Konami saw its first dabblings come to fruition in 1979. By the mid-'80s, it had become a major force both in the coin-op sphere (with worldwide smashes such as the *Track and Field* series) and in the home market (with a range of high-profile releases for the MSX range of computers).

As one of the first six third-party licensees for the NES (along with the likes of Capcom, Hudson, and Bandai), Konami's work on Nintendo's 8-bit console proved to be its making. The company earnings grew from \$10 million in 1987 to \$300 million in 1991 (including an astonishing 2,500% increase in sales between 1989 and 1991 alone) — largely thanks to the popular *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*



Konami's early coin-op releases were mainly action-heavy shoot 'em ups. Clockwise from top left: *Gryzor*, *Thundercross*, and the Japan-only *Gradius III*

games, released on its subsidiary label, Ultra.

The *Turtles* experience hurtled Konami to become the largest NES licensee, the eighth largest software publisher, and the ninth largest toy company in the US. Arcade business was still relatively brisk, and the company was in a dominant position.

In the years that followed, however, Capcom, Sega, and Namco began to flex their muscles on the coin-op scene, while Konami struggled to replicate the earlier successes it had enjoyed with games such as *Gryzor*, *Green Beret*, and the *Gradius* series. Console production remained as illustrious as ever, but without a license as lucrative as the *Turtles*, it fell to novel ideas to propel its fortunes.

They didn't.

After writing off about \$135 million of stock (mostly in the U.S.), Konami posted major losses at the end of its financial year on March 31, 1995. In the meantime the company had invested its R&D efforts in 32-bit platforms, while also rethinking its arcade approach in an effort to take on Sega and Namco at their own game.

The fruits of these toils are slowly coming to bear, with recent coin-ops picking up significant attention in Japan and a selection of impressive-looking original PlayStation and Saturn games on their

way. The recently formed development facility based in Chicago also bears witness to Konami's dedication to R&D, leaving the company poised to reaffirm its position as a world leader in videogame entertainment.

Next Generation visited Konami's Japanese headquarters in Toranomon, in the center of Tokyo, to speak with Nagata Akihiki, the company's general manager.

NG: Konami has a long history of creating videogames. How did you enter the industry?

Mr. Akihiki: We began at first as an arcade company. When the first home consoles came out — or more specifically Nintendo's Famicom [known as the NES in the west] — we started developing software. We



Konami's headquarters (left), are situated in the heart of Tokyo. The company's General Manager Nagata Akihiki (right)



want to sell product that customers can truly enjoy. It's our primary rule.

NG: What were Konami's first arcade releases?

Mr. Akihiki: First, if I remember rightly, there was a game called *Dom*, and maybe *G-End*, a copy of *Space Invaders*. At that time we were specializing in shooting games, bazooka, or tennis games. Technically speaking, we used a lot of the scrolling techniques in our first set of games.

NG: How about your early 16-bit games?

Mr. Akihiki: That's difficult... We did more than 50 titles. As far as sales go, the biggest hit was *T.M.N.T.* [*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*], but that was released on numerous platforms. If you took all versions together, we maybe sold around 5 million units worldwide, mostly in the US — a good figure for a game developed in Japan.

NG: R&D is a big part of game development these days. How many people does Konami currently have working in this field?

Mr. Akihiki: In the whole group, around 900 work in R&D, representing roughly 70% of the total Konami staff. We have centers in Kobe, Osaka, two centers in Tokyo, and different centers in Yokohama, such as Zama. Outside Japan we also have offices in Chicago. Consumer [console] games are made in Tokyo and Osaka without any consideration for a platform — the first thing we decide is the kind of game to make, rather than which platform to write for. Arcade development takes place in Zama and Kobe and we also develop games in Chicago.

NG: Among the 32-bit formats, for which hardware does Konami produce the most?

Mr. Akihiki: Our strategy is to develop one title and convert it for all platforms. We might develop first on the PlayStation, Saturn, or 3DO — there's no specific rule. Whatever the game, our intention is for the consumer to enjoy it on his own chosen platform. We do consider



hardware sales, because they are important to us, and very soon we are going to stop developing for one platform in particular.

NG: But there must be one favored platform for game development?

Mr. Akihiki: Presently we are developing 50% of our games on 16-bit, mainly Super Famicom [Super NES], and the other 50% on 32-bit platforms. But we are slowly drifting toward 32-bit. And maybe 64-bit soon...

NG: Konami has a reputation for producing cute (*kawai*, in Japanese) games. Why is this?

Mr. Akihiki: It's true, we do excel in that field, but we also create good shooting and action games. Recently, we have been interested in RPGs or simulation games. Generally, however,



Konami has updated *Track & Field* with coin-ops, *Combat School* (top), and the rare title *Konami 88* (above)



Konami's '96 line-up is diverse, with an action title, *Project Overkill* (top), joining sports games such as *Konami Links* (top right), its 32-bit RPG, *Genso Suikoden* (mid-right). Konami's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle* license proved incredibly lucrative (coin-op version, right)

Konami covers all games — sports, adventure, etc.

NG: You recently produced the PlayStation RPG, *Genso Suikoden*. Is this a new area Konami is moving into heavily?

Mr. Akihiki: Yes, we are beginning to make more RPGs. *Suikoden* isn't the first RPG we've done, but the previous ones weren't too successful. We're more confident this time!

NG: Your 32-bit software has included fairly unadventurous conversions of the *Parodius* series. How are these going to develop?

Mr. Akihiki: Concerning the content of the game, it will not change very much. Our main concern is to make the game available to owners of different platforms, rather than changing the game's content. We don't know yet if we are going to make any original *Parodius* games just for the PlayStation or Saturn. We are thinking about it, but we want first to release big-hit arcade games on home consoles. *Twin Bee* is a little bit different — we are developing other games, an RPG, for example, around the main character

Konami is investing its R&D efforts in 32-bit platforms, while also rethinking its arcade approach

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"We are developing 50% of our games on 16-bit, and the other 50% on 32-bit platforms. But we are slowly drifting toward 32-bit. And maybe 64-bit soon"

Nagata Akihiki,
general manager



Speed King, a futuristic racing game with more than a passing resemblance to *Psygnosis' Wipeout*, is Konami's most ambitious coin-op yet, featuring an enclosed AS1-style cockpit which seats two players. Its fierce hydraulic movements have attracted a lot of attention

from the original.

NG: But the 16-bit situation in Japan is on the decline?

Mr. Akihiki: I think they will survive for between a year and a year-and-a-half. In my opinion, next fall SFC software will become rare. At the moment, 32-bit and 16-bit represent about half of our production, but soon 32-bit will cover about 80%.

NG: What is your policy abroad?

Mr. Akihiki: We have the same policy as in Japan, but, of course, the culture is very different. There are some Japanese games we cannot release worldwide because they are too specific to the home market — *Goemon*, *Parodius*, and games which use traditional Japanese characters, for example. Abroad, we release a game according to that market — sports games, for example, are numerous in Europe.

NG: How are you finding the home

market of late?

Mr. Akihiki: The home consumer market has really improved, mainly because of the arrival of 32-bit hardware. We see no reason to change our marketing policy, but from now on we are going to make more original games.

NG: Finally, have you plans for Nintendo 64 development?

Mr. Akihiki: Oh yes, absolutely! Although Capcom might contest this, Konami believes itself to be back in the top three coin-op manufacturers in the world (after Namco and Sega), and it has achieved this by moving into the realms of three-dimensional games using dedicated cabinets.

Konami's development center in Kobe is dedicated to arcade R&D. This sizeable facility, which houses around 200 staff, produces about half a dozen coin-ops each year, mainly in the point-and-shoot mold of games such as the three-player *Crypt Killers* — it was here that 1993's successful *Lethal Enforcers* was born.

Next Generation was also able to speak to the Kobe center's Technical

Research Department manager, Tanaka Fumihaki.

NG: How did Konami's racing game, *Speed King*, begin its life?

Mr. Fumihaki: First and foremost we wanted to make a racing game.

Eleven years ago we did a driving game called *WEC Le Mans*, where the player could turn through 360°. Based on this concept, we decided to make *Speed King*.

Concerning the game world, it all takes place in the near future — we wanted to use the same world as *Snatcher* [on the Turbo Grafx and Genesis], so the world was dark and grim. Next time we are going to use a world that's a little more clear.

NG: What was the most difficult part in creating the game?

Mr. Fumihaki: Perfecting the driving sensation was probably the hardest element. The sync between game and hardware was also difficult to get just right.

NG: How many worked on the *Speed King* project?

Mr. Fumihaki: Working from our Kobe center, the entire project took around 20 people.

NG: Does *Speed King* use a dedicated arcade board, and if so, which one?

Mr. Fumihaki: We are using a custom board made especially. The main processor is 32-bit. Next year we are going to use a new 64-bit processor, but we cannot say the name yet. We are also going to use some new semi-conductors for our future boards. The software will be of a higher quality than that in *Midnight Run*.

NG: Are you satisfied with *Speed King* as an end product?

Mr. Fumihaki: Well, I wanted to use oil shock absorbers, but because the game would be in game centers we were not able to use oil. So, instead we used air shock absorbers, which are cleaner. Of course, the response was then different, making it difficult for us to link dampening with graphics. Sometimes the body feeling and graphics weren't in sync.

NG: You say the software technology will be improved, but what about cabinet technology?

Mr. Fumihaki: Both technologies must be improved together. For example in computer technology, not only has CISC been improved to RISC chips, but also compilers are more advanced. Concerning mapping techniques, we will soon be going from mipmap-mapping to bump-mapping. But we do not use bump-mapping for *Speed King*.

As well as making plans to move into the PC market, Konami has created a new publishing sub-label, Konami XXL Sports Series, dedicated to tapping the enormous

Western market that exists for these kinds of games.

Next Generation visited the company's Jimbocho development center, where most of its noncoin-op games are created, and met the president of Konami Computer



Konami Computer Entertainment President, Kitaue Kazumi (top) & *Speed King* creator, Tanaka Fumihaki (above)



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Entertainment, Kitaue Kazumi.

NG: What sort of work goes on in Konami's Jombocho center?

Mr. Kazumi: Here, we're mainly working on PlayStation and Saturn games, and we are also doing some PC games. We haven't started work on Nintendo 64 games yet, but they are in our plans.

For the European market we have done *Winning Eleven* and *NBA In The Zone*. For the Japanese market we've been working on *Genso Suikoden*, *NBA Power Dunkers*, and *Snatcher*, all for the PlayStation. We have been doing some typically Japanese games for the Saturn such as *Tokimeki Memorial* and *Chibi Maruko*. These are games that are targeted for young students.

NG: Why does development take place first on the PlayStation, and then on Saturn afterward?

Mr. Kazumi: The PlayStation development tools were done before the Saturn's, and we began our contract with Sega around a year after Sony. It has only been a question of schedule, nothing more. Now, we are going to develop according to the market trends. If the Saturn is more successful we will develop on that. Looking at the European and US market, the PlayStation seems to have a better position than the Saturn, so we must consider this as we develop.

NG: Is Konami more interested in original games or conversions?

Mr. Kazumi: We are developing some original games and we are also doing coin-op conversions and sequels to games on other formats. Until now, our jobs were made easy by developing series and conversions, which represented a large number of our developments before. From now, we are going to make more original software for a dedicated platform.



Konami's *Haunted Castle* coin-op title is the precursor to the forthcoming home-console and PlayStation title *Castlevania XX*

Genso Suikoden is a good example of this.

NG: So there's no danger that you might be specializing in the PlayStation software too much?

Mr. Kazumi: In terms of number of games, after Namco, we are the second largest game producer for the PlayStation. For the Saturn, except for Sega of course, we are the first game developer. We are in a good position for both platforms.

NG: So are all of your games going to appear on both Saturn and PlayStation?

Mr. Kazumi: The PlayStation's strong point is, of course, its polygon handling abilities. Saturn has different characteristics — we've developed a soccer game and a basketball game for the PlayStation in full 3D and we've been doing preliminary tests to see if we can develop these on the Saturn.

NG: Are you using the new Saturn OS, the Sega Graphics Library (SGL)?

Mr. Kazumi: Yes, we are using it despite its great number of bugs (laughs). Basically, the concept of the Saturn's new OS and PlayStation development tools are the same. But the Saturn development tools need a little bit of work.

NG: Which types of games are most popular in Japan?

Mr. Kazumi: Simulations and RPGs are the most popular. So, next year we would like to develop some RPG titles, but it is not easy. Working in-house, it took us two years to make *Genso Suikoden*, compared to only six months for the average shooting game.

NG: PlayStation owners will be looking forward to the new *Dracula XX*. Is it being produced at Jimbocho?

Mr. Kazumi: Yes, we're doing it here. It has actually developed into an action RPG, rather than just an action game — the player will have to use his head. A CGI intro has been added. The game should be released by the summer in Japan, and late 1996 in Europe.



Konami's Jimbocho center (left) houses the company's Japanese console development facility (top) and its rather cramped game testing area (above). The company has expanded its research-and-development team to 900 people in the quest to better compete with industry giants Namco and Sega

NG: It's one of Konami's biggest ever games — how many platforms has it been developed for?

Mr. Kazumi: First it was released for the 8-bit Famicom, eight years ago, if I remember rightly. Since then it has been released on the Turbo Grafx, PC Sharp X68000, coin-op, Super NES and the Genesis. In sales terms, the first disk system version sold around 1 million!

NG: How is the series changing with the advent of 32-bit systems?

Mr. Kazumi: Perhaps the best point is the music. With CD-ROM, game sound became better and many games now use speech. Graphics are changing, but this doesn't improve gameplay, it only improves the game's image.

NG: What do you think will happen to the 32-bit market when the Nintendo 64 is released?

Mr. Kazumi: Each format — Saturn, PlayStation, and N64 — will end up with a third of the market. No system will be the big winner.

“Now, we are going to develop according to the market trends. If the Saturn is more successful we will develop on that”

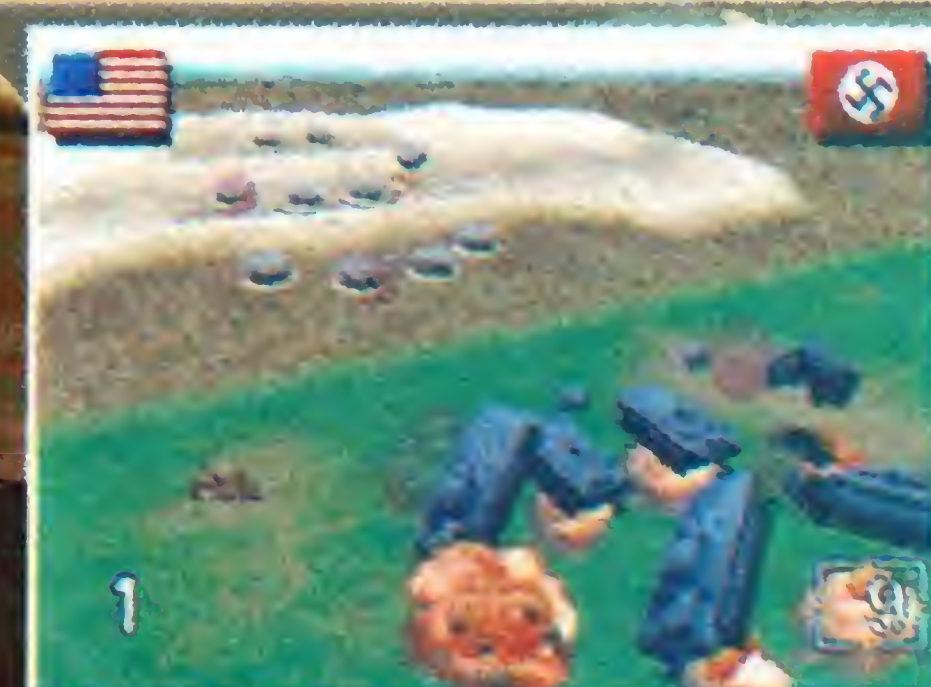
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president, Konami
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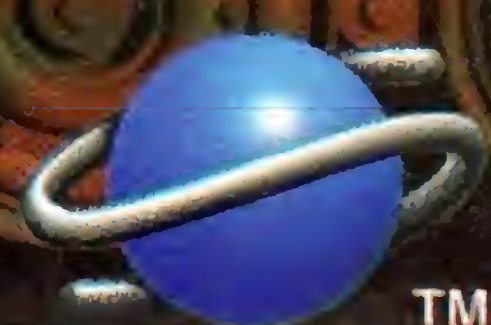
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Bottom of the Ninth PlayStation **Shellshock** PlayStation **Wipeout** Saturn **Panzer Dragoon II Zwei** Saturn
Art of Fighting 3 Neo-Geo **Civilization 2** PC **Terra Nova** PC **Zork Nemesis** PC **Tokyo Wars** Arcade



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Every month finals section presents the latest reviews of computer and video games with sharp insights into the latest trends, surprising new games, technical innovations, and those titles from which you should stay away. Check our star chart below for explanations of the ratings.

★★★★★ **Revolutionary**
 Brilliantly conceived and flawlessly executed; a new high-water mark.

★★★★ **Excellent**
 A high-quality and inventive new game. Either a step forward for an existing genre, or a successful attempt at creating a new one.

★★★ **Good**
 A solid and competitive example of an established game style.

★★ **Average**
 Perhaps competent; certainly uninspired.

★ **Bad**
 Crucially flawed in design or application.

PlayStation

Hardball 5

Publisher: Accolade Sports
Developer: Accolade

The *Hardball* series is one of the best selling series ever on the PC, but on the consoles, the series has never quite caught on. It's easy to see why.

Like many PC sports games *Hardball 5* is full of stats and simulation options and, for the pure baseball fan who wants the most realistic simulation with the least amount of control, it's the best. The problem is that when the game goes to the field the pace is slow, control is anything but good, the graphics are horrible for a PlayStation game, the sound isn't on par with even other baseball games, and the pitcher-batter showdown isn't very exciting. *Hardball 5* is only fun when the games are over and you can see the realistic statistics — when you're actually playing all you want is for the game to end.

Hardball 5 is best viewed as a strict statistical simulation. Anyone who's looking for a playable baseball game should look elsewhere.

Rating: ★★



NBA Live '96's versatility, many options, and most importantly, its solid gameplay, make it a hit

NBA Live '96

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Electronic Arts Canada

Even EA admits that as far as technically innovative basketball games go, it's way behind Sony Interactive, Konami, even Crystal Dynamics. But when it comes to gameplay, *NBA Live '96* is the most consuming basketball game on the market.

PlayStation

OFF THE WALL



Konami's new line of sports games continues to impress. There's a steep learning curve (but lots of control) in batting and fielding

Bottom Of The Ninth

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami

Konami's sports division impressed everyone with its incredible looking *In The Zone* and *Goal Storm*. Now we've got *Bottom Of The Ninth*, and if the looks aren't as impressive as other games in the series, the gameplay more than makes up for it.

When you're at bat you control a rectangular cursor (using the D pad) that increases in size depending on the player's abilities. At first it's tricky to maneuver the cursor to the proper place and be able to time your swing (with the X button) simultaneously. The batting system ensures that you'll have control of where your hit goes, but it all happens so fast (like in real baseball) that you often aren't able to do exactly what you want. As your skills improve (just like in real baseball), and you accustom yourself to using the catcher's glove placement as a starting point, the game gets easier.

On the mound you have control of a full arsenal of real pitches. If you start a sinker at the knee caps it drops into the dirt, and the same goes for all other pitches that move. Changing up your pitches is a great way to keep the batter off-balance and the only way to ring up strikeouts. In previous baseball games you just put crazy curves on the ball and left the batter guessing, but in *BOTN* you have to change speeds and catch the corners just like in real baseball. The unusual amount of control makes *BOTN*'s pitcher-batter interface possibly the best in any baseball game.

It's in the field, though, where things get tricky — you actually have to judge fly balls in order to catch them. At first this is extremely difficult, but the game's learning curve enables you to improve after taking fly ball practice in the Training Camp mode.

All these good points don't mean everything is perfect — the screen is extremely cluttered, the graphics never rise above average, and there aren't any real major league stadiums. This game, however, is still an intensely detailed baseball simulation, and a great videogame.

Rating: ★★★★★



Bottom of the Ninth takes a new approach to baseball control

PlayStation

Meet "Da Wardenz," the world's first freelance tank corps to wear Air Jordans into combat (right)



TRIGGER HAPPY

Shellshock

Publisher: US Gold

Developer: Core Design

Core Design has been responsible for some of the best action games available for console systems, including the classic *Thunderstrike* for Sega CD and its sequel for Saturn. So, it's no surprise that *Shellshock* puts another notch in Core's belt.

Set in the near future, the game gives the player the role of "Green," the new recruit in a small, elite corps of freelance tank commandos. They're known as "Da Wardenz," because they've pledged to fight terrorism and oppression (for cash, of course), and because the group is made up entirely of bad-ass, jive-talkin', inner-city African-Americans. This gives *Shellshock* a vastly different look and feel than the majority of titles around, and makes one of the game's more interesting features.

For the most part, the rest of the game lives up to the hook. Draw-in is all but hidden by fog, there are plenty of optional tank upgrades, and it controls smoothly. Of course, driving a tank isn't exactly like taking the Mustang out for a spin, and control and response are paced accordingly, which can take some getting used to.

In fact, if there's one complaint to be made about the game, it's concerning the steep learning curve. You've got to stick with this a good long while before you have a prayer of getting anywhere, and if the game were any less well-designed you'd throw the controller down in frustration. Also, *Shellshock* shares *Thunderstrike*'s main shortcoming: most missions simply involve going out and destroying everything, with little variation. These aren't minor quibbles, but for those with the determination and patience, *Shellshock* has its rewards.

Rating: ★★★★★



Blast everything that moves, don't kill too many hostages. Simple enough, but tougher to pull off than it sounds, and tougher than it should be

The vast array of options and features make *Live* the most versatile and complete basketball game yet. That doesn't mean it's perfect, but until something better comes along it remains the king of console hardwood.

On the down side, the players still skate around on the floor, posting up is useless, the dunks are completely unreal, and the fouls are a bit outrageous.

Where *Live* continues to dominate, however, is in its totally realistic and easy-to-call plays. You've got 16 quick plays you can call from each of the seven offensive sets which enables you to be a coach on the floor. There are more options and stats here than any other game, and when it comes to a basketball sim that will keep you up nights, the other roundball titles couldn't even hold *Live*'s water bottle.

Rating: ★★★★★

NBA Shoot Out

Publisher: Sony Interactive
Developer: Sony Interactive Europe

NBA Shoot Out doesn't unseat *NBA Live '96* as the basketball sim champ, but it has definitely raised the stakes for next year's

battle. The game uses crisp polygon players and ultra-smooth motion-captured animation to deliver its game to the court. And it looks simply fantastic.

Somewhere in the delivery, however, *NBA Shoot Out* comes up a bit short compared to *Live '96*. While the animation looks great, it actually causes one of the game's biggest problems: the motion-captured routines slow the game down to a snail's pace which results in a decidedly stiff control that gives you little feel for what's happening on the court. Still, *Shoot Out* is more



NBA Shoot Out is more technically innovative than any title available

technologically innovative than every basketball game out there, and an attempt to include full simulation options, like a season mode, and a full roster of realistic players who perform close to their abilities, really made this a close battle. But in the end, the old pro *Live '96* had too many moves for Sony's rookie.

Shoot Out has taken a stab at changing the basketball game as we know it, and while it failed in several areas what's left is a beautiful game that offers some decent gameplay. Unfortunately, it never consumes you like a great basketball game should.

Rating: ★★★

PO'ed

Publisher: Accolade

Developer: Any Channel

PO'ed originally came out for 3DO several months ago, and in a world quickly becoming saturated with *Doom* clones, it stands out for a few reasons.

First, the enemies are bizarre to the point of being disturbing. Second, the level designs, and there are a lot of levels, are among the most intricate we've ever seen. In fact, the main problem with the game is that it's a little



PO'ed's overall graphic look is good, but it's far from stunning

over-designed. Apparently *PO'ed* began life as a project in someone's garage, and has the earmarks of having been worked on too obsessively for too long — "Too clever for its own good," is how the 3DO version was described. The PlayStation version alleviates this somewhat, since the polygon engine in the Sony unit enables better light-sourcing and clearer textures, which makes the often-confusing level layouts a little easier to navigate.

The extra buttons on the PlayStation pad also make the game a lot more playable. This is because the battling ship's cook, who you control, cannot only run and shoot, but also jump, fly, and

rating saturn

even do backflips, and switching between all these options using a 3DO pad was a real chore. The overall experience, however, is roughly the same: the game is big, extremely challenging, and packs a weird enough sense of humor to keep you interested even when the frustration factor is steadily growing.

If *PO'ed* doesn't exactly rank with the elite of the genre, the game still deserves a hefty measure of success — although a cult of *PO'ed* fans is a mildly frightening thought.

Rating: ★★★★★

Return Fire

Publisher: Time Warner Interactive

Developer: Silent Software

Here's another great 3DO title (reviewed in **NG 4**, April '95) ported to PlayStation with pleasing results. Actually, *Return Fire*, a videogame version of capture the flag played with tanks and assault choppers, is such a simple game, both conceptually and graphically, that it would be surprising to find much difference between this and 3DO's version.



Return Fire stands as one of the year's best two-player games

Sure enough, the graphics are nearly identical (there's been some attempt to make things different: the flag-grabbing jeeps of the original have been replaced by Hummers for example, but they're functionally the same vehicles), and the gameplay is nearly the same as well.

The soundtrack, consisting of heavy-duty classical tracks, has less presence in PlayStation, but that's subjective. This soundtrack still has more than enough kick to keep the game moving.

The bottom line is that, as a one-player game, *Return Fire* turns mass destruction into goofy fun. As a two-player game, it's one of the best titles of the year.

Rating: ★★★★★

Slam 'N' Jam

Publisher: Crystal Dynamics

Developer: Left Field Productions

On the 3DO a year ago, *Slam 'n' Jam* set new standards for



Slam 'n' Jam's ultra-smooth play, its inclusion of Kareem and Magic, and the two-player competition make up for its increasingly outdated looks

graphics and playability on a home system. And just one year later, the once-impressive graphics look flat when compared to the crisp polygons of *In The Zone* (Konami) and *Shoot Out* (Sony). One thing, however, holds up just fine, and that's the game's ultra-smooth play.

A two-player game of basketball in *Slam 'n' Jam* is an up-and-down battle that requires skill, timing, and the proper use of fictional players. While every man on the court is rated in several categories and each player performs differently — with the exception of Kareem and Magic — the players just aren't real. If Crystal Dynamics had been able to use the same engine for a game with real NBA players, then *Slam 'n' Jam* would have been a serious basketball sim, and might have hung on. As the game is, *Slam 'n' Jam* is a game whose time is quickly passing.

It's still a great two-player game, but the one-player game doesn't hold its end up, and the technological race is passing this game right by.

Rating: ★★★

Worms

Publisher: Ocean

Developer: Team 17

After some wrangling with Sony, which is allegedly bias against games that aren't 3D or don't show off PlayStation's power, one of the most popular games to hit Europe is finally on its way to the US. *Worms* shares some similarities with other Euro-titles, notably *Lemmings*, in that it emphasizes strategy and sick humor over graphic flair. In fact, the game's objectives are blindingly simple: blow up the other guy real good.

Each competitor (up to four human players, four computer-controlled ones, or any mix) commands a squad of four heavily

armed worms, and if you think worms with arms are strange, you haven't seen the half of it. Each worm takes turns choosing a weapon and firing at the enemies. Some weapons, like shotguns and uzis, require a direct line-of-sight, others, like grenades and various bombs, have to be lobbed. When a worm is hit, it takes damage depending on how accurate the strike was and what sort of weapon was used.

It sounds straightforward enough, but the randomly generated landscapes are a mess of hills and crevices, and there's a lot of skill involved in judging direction and distance, especially since it's possible to harm your own forces. In fact, the game plays almost exactly like a cross between *Lemmings* and *Cannon Fodder*: simple mechanics, a high level of challenge, and plenty of cartoon violence.

It's the little details that make *Worms* come alive. The annelid warriors scream war cries, they taunt each other, and they beg for mercy, all with these really silly high-pitched voices. Hand-to-hand attacks even include a *Street Fighter II*-style Dragon punch, and you really haven't lived until you've heard a worm scream out a diminutive "Sho-ru-ken!"

In other words, this new title is great stuff.

Rating: ★★★★★



Worms is a fantastic blend of Lemmings and Cannon Fodder

Saturn



What small advances Congo makes in terms of gameplay are overshadowed by lousy graphics

Congo The Movie — The Lost City of Zinj

Publisher: Sega

Developer: Sega

Any videogame saddled with the movie-license equivalent of the Bubonic Plague is a dubious prospect at best, but *Congo* the videogame is slightly surprising. There's actually a good concept beneath its mediocre surface.

Taking the classic first-person shooter out of its never-ending succession of corridors and transferring it to the jungles of Africa could have given an inventive twist for *Congo*. Instead, *Congo's* jungle environment is just for show. The player is forced to trudge along predetermined paths with no ability to venture into and explore the surrounding jungle.

Even without an evolution in gameplay, *Congo* could have passed as a semi-respectable *Doom*-clone if not for its abysmal graphics. Every plant, animal, and object in *Congo* is pitifully lacking in anything closely resembling 3D. Couple the graphics with an ambiguous sense of control, and *Congo* becomes a game offering more excuses to bypass it than to purchase it.

Rating: ★★

Ghen War

Publisher: Sega

Developer: Jumping Jack Software

At first glance *Ghen War* looks like any number of games you've seen before, from *Id's Doom* to Psygnosis' *Krazy Ivan*. But if you stick with the game, sparks of originality start to shine through.

First, the enemies are smart. Sure, you'll come across some that are more like targets than predators, but it's also not unusual to find an enemy sneaking around behind the crest of a hill in order to attack from some hidden corner. A second notable feature is the soundtrack which, much like in a major motion picture, heightens in intensity whenever

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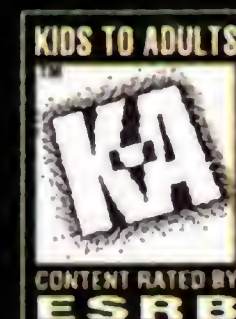
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Saturn



Each of the original tracks has been duplicated to near perfection on Saturn. This version is actually a little faster than the one on PlayStation

A CLOSE CALL

Wipeout

Publisher: Sega

Developer: Psygnosis

When *Wipeout* hit the shelves for PlayStation, racing gamers finally got a taste of what 32-bit gaming was all about, and Sony was thanking its lucky stars that such an impressive title was exclusively its own. But in the wild and wacky videogame industry, very little is to be counted on, and Sony's "exclusive" with Euro-designers Psygnosis soon went bust. Now, several months later, Sega is releasing its own version of *Wipeout* for Saturn, and outside of a slight drop in graphic clarity, the game is nearly identical.

All of the details that helped make the game what it is today (a 32-bit legend, for those of you not paying attention) — the music, the mind-warping tracks, the overwhelming sense of style, and the precision design — are present and accounted for in the Saturn version. There's a slight difference in the feel of the control, but nothing that could be called better or worse, just a little different. In fact, the biggest difference is that the Saturn version actually runs a little faster than the original.

Of course, it's important to remember that a big part of the game's original impact was due to the dazzling graphics, and while you won't miss much in the Saturn version, it does lack that certain gloss for which PlayStation is known. In the end, however, it doesn't matter. Sure, the PlayStation version of *Wipeout* looks a little crisper than the Saturn version, but outside of that, we're talking about the same game.

Rating: ★★★★★



The loss of resolution is most clearly seen in the special effects of the game



Ghen War's soundtrack heightens in intensity at appropriate times

danger is near. Combine this with interesting landscapes that give plenty of opportunities to duck for cover or wait in ambush and you've got a thriller on your hands.

What really sets *Ghen War* apart, however, is the variety of mission objectives. It would have been easy for the developers to set up enemy targets in each level for you to mow down until they're all gone, but that's not the case. From one level to the next you may be responsible for finding

certain elements of a puzzle, freeing prisoners, or destroying key enemy installations. Of course, there are plenty of rogue enemies to take out along the way, but as we've seen in less interesting action games, all shooting and no strategy makes "Action Game X" a dull boy.

Ghen War may not be the most original videogame you've ever played, but there's definitely enough solid gameplay and occasional touches of originality

to make it a worthwhile game.
Rating: ★★★

Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3

Publisher: Williams

Bally/Midway

Developer: Eurocom Entertainment

The original *MK3* was more imitative than innovative, offering practically no improvements to the admittedly excellent game mechanics of *MKII* other than a combo system stolen from rival

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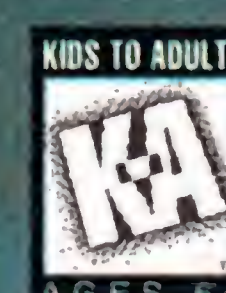
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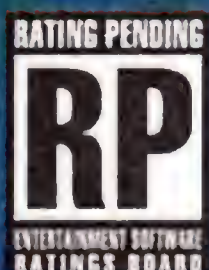
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Saturn

OFF THE SCALE

Panzer Dragoon II Zwei

Publisher: Sega

Developer: Sega of Japan

In a surprising victory for art and plot direction, *Panzer Dragoon II Zwei* proves that visual sophistication and compelling storylines can sometimes overcome less than revolutionary gameplay. That statement in itself is rather startling, as gameplay is generally considered the most important element of any videogame.

Panzer II does little to depart from the format of the first *Panzer Dragoon*. Gameplay is challenging and adequately entertaining, but it still consists primarily of the "shoot-and-move" tactics that are the hallmark of track-based shooters. Such niceties, like the ability to change view perspective, alternate pathways, and a berserk attack mode, help to liven up the game, but innovative play is not exactly *Panzer Dragoon II Zwei*'s forte. Ultimately, *Panzer II*'s game engine restricts the very three-dimensional environments that next-generation systems were supposed to open up.

What separates *Panzer II* from other games, however, and what makes it an exceptional gaming experience is its gorgeous graphics and provocative storyline. It's rare that the look and substance of prerendered FMV sequences can make up for gameplay that's only slightly above average, but *Panzer II* is simply enthralling. The visuals alone are compelling enough to keep you playing, just to see what awe-inspiring sight is around the next corner. Couple these exceptional graphics with an absorbing storyline that really draws you in and it's easy to forgive the "one-man-versus-the-galaxy" premise.

Although *Panzer II* should be considered an exception and not the rule, when the screen is filled with a plethora of stunning enemies against an exquisitely detailed background of a fascinating alien world, it's incredibly easy to overlook any repetitiveness in gameplay.

While it may verge on the unthinkable, *Panzer Dragoon II Zwei* is a wonderful example of style over substance that succeeds impeccably.

Rating: ★★★★★



The bosses in *Panzer II* are fascinating, challenging, and deadly. Don't fall into the trap of stopping and staring

Killer Instinct. None of the new character designs were terribly exciting either, and on the whole the game felt as though the designers were either terribly rushed or very lazy.

Ultimate MK3 doesn't remedy the situation at all. Williams seems to be following the same road "pioneered" by Capcom with

its *Street Fighter II* series, and *UMK3* would fall into roughly the same category as *Super Street Fighter II* — a re-release with minimal "improvements" so the same game can effectively be marketed twice. Like *SSFII*, *UMK3* adds four characters, but Williams didn't even bother with the effort of coming up with new ones.



UMK3 is exclusive to Saturn and is nearly arcade-perfect

Instead, they've hauled out Kitana, Jade, Scorpion, and Reptile from *MKII*.

As far as the Saturn conversion is concerned, the game is complete and nearly arcade perfect, missing only a few frames of animation. The only major flaw can be found with Shang Tsung's morphing ability, which brings the game to a grinding halt for a second or so while the new character graphics load from the CD-ROM, a miserable necessity shared by the original *MK3* for PlayStation.

Furthermore, since the original *MK3* never made it to Saturn, there's less reason to complain about the cold marketing strategy behind *UMK3*'s release — this is the only version available for the system, so it's not like they're trying to squeeze another \$60 from the same audience. Still, there's no getting around the fact that the *UMK3* experience is as exciting as the "normal" *MK3* experience, which is to say, not very.

Rating: ★★★

Virtual Boy

Golf

Publisher: Nintendo

Developer: Nintendo

For some inexplicable reason, the golf game is a mainstay of any system's offerings. It's always one of the first games offered to the consumer and therefore the marketing folks must believe there is demand for it. So, despite the limited offerings available for Virtual Boy, it's no surprise there's a golf game.

What's surprising is that *Golf* for Virtual Boy is a rather competent rendition of a golf game (despite its brainless title). Gameplay compares favorably with flashier siblings on home console systems. Standard golf game elements such as club selection, a swing meter, and realistic course representations make for a respectable simulation experience.

The only real downside of the game is the Virtual Boy's inferior image quality which makes just about every feature in the distance difficult to make out.

Golf is satisfactory, but there is little effective use of the Virtual Boy's limited 3D abilities. One has to wonder if the same people who purchase golf games on other consoles will show any interest in the Virtual Boy edition.

Rating: ★★

Nester's Funky Bowling

Publisher: Nintendo

Developer: Nintendo

Nester's Funky Bowling can be considered one of Virtual Boy's more enjoyable games. But once again, there is little here that shows off the supposed 3D capability of this 32-bit oddity.

Gameplay features a simple but effective control interface that enables the player to influence the speed and spin of the bowling ball. And for once, Virtual Boy's limited graphic capabilities don't inhibit gameplay. Otherwise, there is little to be said about the overall gaming experience. The ultimate purpose of the game is to do the exact same thing over and over again, but then, this could be considered the very essence of bowling itself.

If for some reason you're searching for a Virtual Boy game, *Nester's Funky Bowling* can be considered a solid title. But just how many people search for a virtual bowling videogame experience remains questionable.

Rating: ★★

Tetris 3-D

Publisher: Nintendo

Developer: Nintendo

There was a time when Game Boys flew off the shelves into the hands of adults who were addicted to the greatest puzzle game of all time. The hallowed name "*Tetris*" was synonymous with portable gaming excellence. Oh, how the mighty have fallen.

If Nintendo is hoping for lightening to strike twice, it's in for quite a disappointment. *Tetris 3-D* epitomizes the problems inherent in the Virtual Boy itself. The simple yet challenging gameplay is almost entirely gone; what remains is an ill-conceived mutation that fails to compare even remotely to the original.

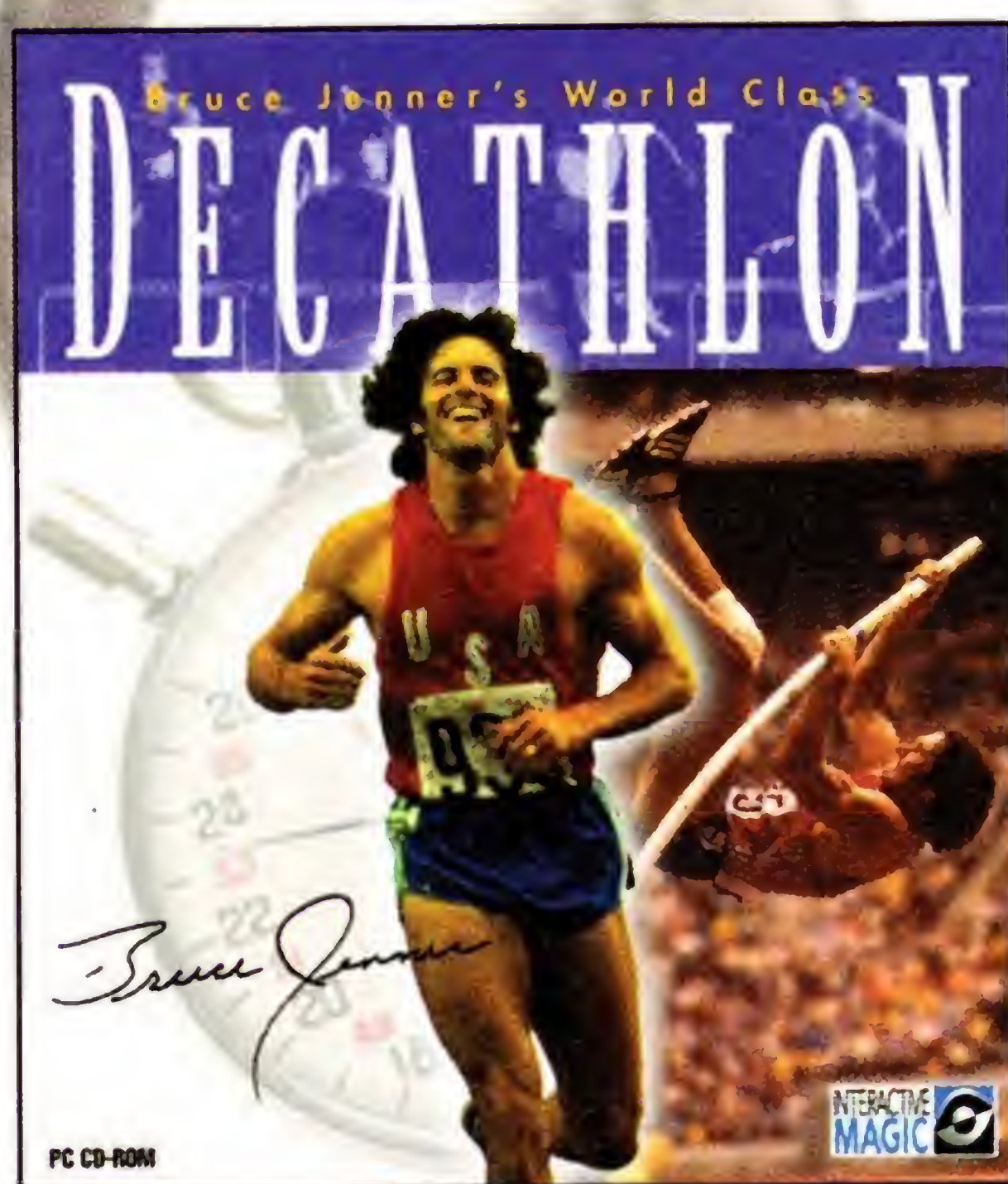
Although there are actually three different game variations contained in *Tetris 3-D* (3-D Tetris, Center-Fill, and Puzzle) each one is hampered by an inadequate 3D view that frequently blocks the player's view and hampers attempts at analyzing and determining moves.

Ultimately, the player now ends up spending more time fighting with the game's design flaws than playing or enjoying it. It's what you might call... baffling.

Rating: ★

Bruce Jenner's World Class DECATHLON

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Wario Land

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo

As far as classic *Mario*-style side-scrolling games go, *Wario Land* is a competent addition to this distinguished line of games. Although the main character featured in the game isn't Mario, classic gameplay elements like jumping on enemies, collecting coins, power-ups, and bonus levels are all retained.

Wario Land even goes as far as to actually incorporate the Virtual Boy's 3D capabilities into the game. But it should be noted that the ability to leap forward and backward in the 3D plane does little to add to the actual gameplay. The 3D ability is really just an elaborate way of accessing familiar side-scrolling levels and bonus rooms.

As Virtual Boy games go, *Wario Land* is innocuous enough. But ultimately, the game doesn't feature any significant advancement in gameplay beyond the classic *Mario* game structure. Still, this is a game that will be welcome in the collection of any true *Mario* fan.

Rating: ★★

Neo-Geo

Magical Drop II

Publisher: Neo-Geo
Developer: SNK

A puzzle game that borrows heavily from Capcom's *Bust-A-Move*, *Magical Drop II* is an intense fast-moving puzzle game. The quick decision-making process needed in *Tetris* is accelerated even more. You don't have to be as precise as some puzzle games, but there is no time to think, just time to do.

Magical Drop II comes on strong, but as the game moves on it can become quite monotonous. *Magical Drop II* is, however, still a solid puzzle game that is likely to trap more than one person into hours of play.

Rating: ★★★

Art Of Fighting 3

Publisher: Neo-Geo
Developer: SNK

Stop the presses! There's a 2D fighter for the Neo-Geo with solid graphics, balanced gameplay, and the occasional adult language.

AOF3 features eight different fighters who all have the usual array of special moves with which they fight across Mexico. The play control is smooth and the fighting is crisp, but ultimately *AOF3* suffers from being too similar to every other 2D fighting game on the market.

Rating: ★★★

PC



Not only do they fly beautifully, the planes in *Advanced Tactical Fighters* look beautiful

Advanced Tactical Fighters

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Jane's Combat Simulations

Whoever put Jane's Information Group, one of the largest and most respected civilian sources on military hardware (it's also the one behind *Jane's All the World's Aircraft* and *Jane's Defense Weekly*), together with Electronic Arts (creators of *US Navy Fighters*) to form Jane's Combat Simulations deserves a raise —

this is an excellent combination for flight sim fans everywhere. *ATF* is the first product of the partnership, and as such it's a good sign of what's to come.

The emphasis on everything in *ATF* is absolute realism, from the way the planes handle to the layouts of each cockpit. The enemy AI is astoundingly good. In fact, almost too good. It's virtually impossible to complete a mission successfully the first time out, and one of the game's biggest shortcomings is that having to fly a mission over and over can get dull really quick.

However, the variety of planes, and the utter realism of the game's flight engine more than makes up for mission repetition. Although some of the planes are hypothetical — like the Lockheed X-32 ASTOVL (Advanced Short Take Off/Vertical Landing) — every plane has its own distinct, real-world feel, and the way each one handles is invariably authentic.

This realism, combined with the beautiful high-resolution graphics we'd expect from the designers of *US Navy Fighters*, is a winning formula from any standpoint. The difficulty and

steep learning curve may, however, be a little daunting to the novice gamer.

Rating: ★★★★★



Big Red Racing's waterways, quarry roads, and snowy pathways are simple yet fun

Big Red Racing

Publisher: Domark
Developer: Domark

It's not *IndyCar Racing II*, but as an arcade-style racing game, *Big Red Racing* holds its own.

You can race anything from a pontoon boat to a snow plow, and the tracks are equally varied. Everything is rendered on the fly in realtime, which means you can see anything, from any angle, at any time. And although the graphics are very chunky (there's no high-res mode), the racing is still pretty smooth; since the

PC

LANDMARK

Civilization II

Publisher: Microprose
Developer: Microprose

After waiting five years, any follow-up to one of the classic and best strategy games in the history of the PC had better be pretty damn good. Incredible as it may seem, *Civilization II* lives up to its pedigree — in fact, this may be one of the most balanced and playable games ever released.

Civ II includes some 88 civilization advances and 51 unit types. The extra entries in both categories bridge gaps from the first game, add more flexibility and depth, and give the player a lot more options. But it's the changes made to combat, diplomacy, and trade that make the most dramatic improvements. Instead of a single round of all-or-nothing combat, battles between units are now a series of attacks, and different units can take varying amounts of damage.

Diplomacy also has a greater influence: treaties with other civilizations have a lot more impact on how they behave toward you, and they remember betrayals. The trade system has been expanded to include actual commodities like gold and silk, and managing these exchanges is nearly a game in itself.

Civ II is so well designed that it's easy to overlook one nagging thing: it's not really a sequel. From what we gather, the designers initially wanted to call this *Civilization 2.0*, since it's really a refinement and expansion of *Civ 1*, rather than a true sequel. However, if somewhat misleading semantics in the title is the only bad thing you can point to, that hardly detracts from what the designers have accomplished: taking one of PC gaming's finest titles and bettering it.

Rating: ★★★★★



The look is new, the gameplay is improved, but the experience is pretty much the same. Although here, that's a good thing



Although the game comes with a lengthy manual, one improvement lifted from *CivNet* is help screens for every conceivable option

rating pc

PC



Don't you hate it when you don't get enough caffeine in the morning? (far left). You also can give special orders to your squad, such as Gags, here, performing repairs on a telescope (left)



POWERFUL

Terra Nova**Publisher:** Looking Glass Technologies**Developer:** Looking Glass Technologies

Looking Glass has always been known for breaking the barriers of conventional gameplay, and it has done it again with *Terra Nova*, a fine game that sets new standards for squad-level control and pulse-pounding action. The 39 missions are played out in a first-person perspective through the visor of your Powered Battle Armor (PBA). Three variations of PBAs (standard, heavy, and scout) and a slew of weapons and special items are available to take along for the ride, while even a few squad members will tag along. But while all of the PBA options and command varieties may be daunting at first (you can demand them to do anything, from scouting positions to following a predetermined path), by using the mouse and keyboard together, the game is surprisingly easy to control.

Although, in a technical sense, the graphics aren't terribly impressive (since the highest resolution possible is 320x400), if Looking Glass had attempted higher resolutions, the drop in game speed and performance would have been unacceptable. And even at this low resolution, the textured landscapes look as good as any we've seen.

There are FMV sequences couched in between missions, but they're short, sweet, and easy to skip, and enable players to get right back to the action. Along with a built-in, random scenario builder and the promise of a network player pack coming, *Terra Nova* is an all-around stunning effort.

Rating: ★★★★★

With your jump-jets, you can get a good look at an area before committing yourself to entering

game is built around multiplayer competition, the lower graphic detail means it runs just as smooth with six people racing as it does with one.

In fact, the game is so geared toward multiple players it's practically a fault — as a single-player game, there's much to be desired. The computer has an uncanny ability to drive every computerized racer poorly except for the one that's always just a tad ahead of you, and it feels a lot like the computer is cheating. This makes trying to get through a single-player tournament a frustrating experience at best.

Big Red Racing is an entertaining racer, but before you pick it up, you might want to make sure you have a friend or two with whom to play.

Rating: ★★★**Deep Space Nine: Harbinger****Publisher:** Viacom NewMedia**Developer:** Stormfront Studios

Sometimes, when you expect a product to be entertaining and it's not, it's worse than if you had no expectations at all. That's exactly the emotion *Deep Space Nine: Harbinger* evokes. With the actors who portray the characters

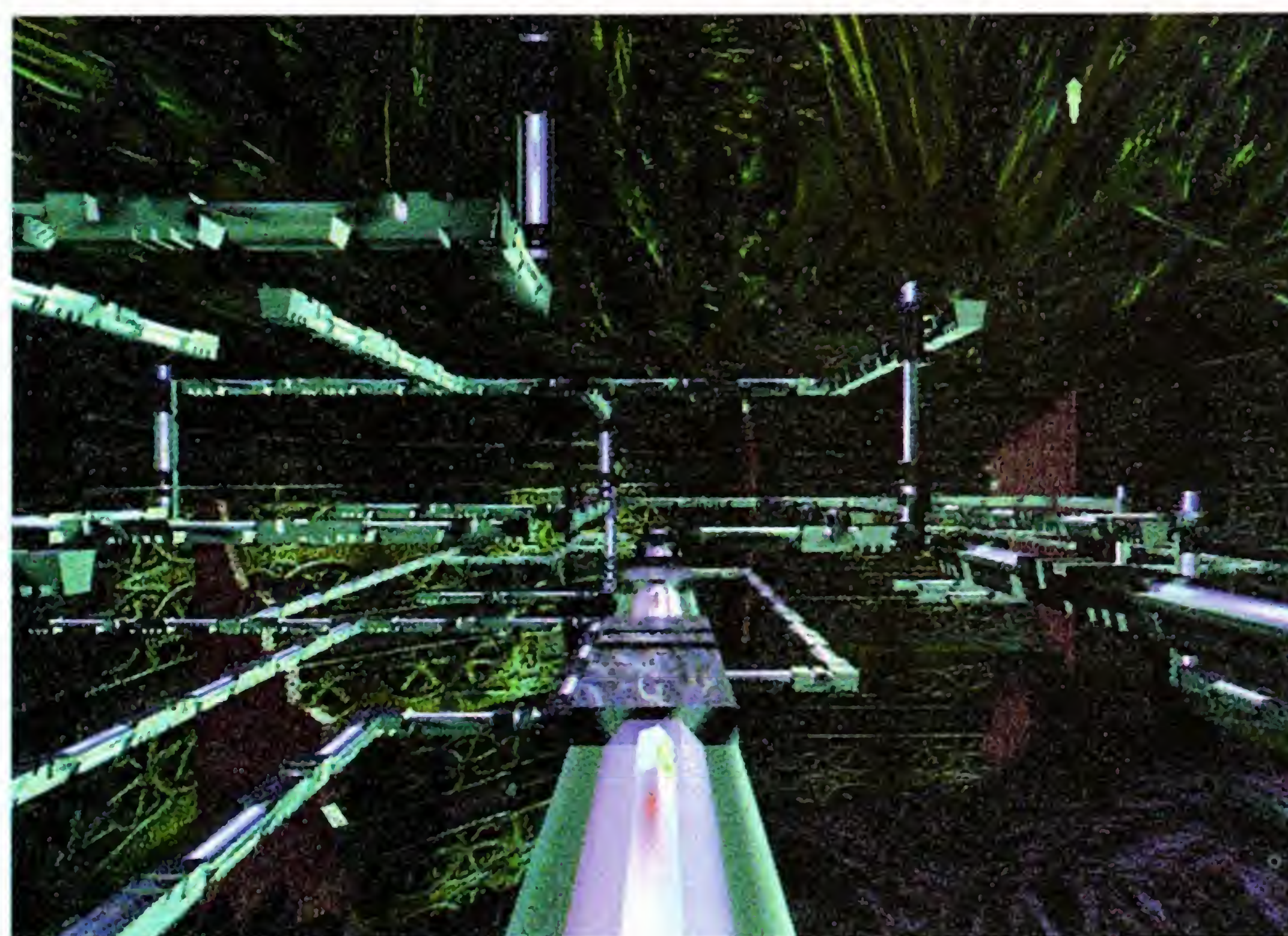
on the television show voice acting, and some incredible rendered environments and characters, what could go wrong? Well, just about everything.

The game manages to take the worst parts of *The Hive* and mesh them with the annoying, incoherent puzzles of *The 11th Hour*. The entire game is filled

with various things to do: labyrinths through which you wander; incredibly innane, senseless puzzles that you're supposed to solve; and arcade sequences that are as fun as taking a hammer to your head.

The sad thing is that this could have been a great game. With a little thought, a bit of

coherency, and a storyline that didn't seem so contrived, it could have been a real winner. As it is, the actors should've spent their time on another TV episode.

Rating: ★

In one of the most annoying sequences of *Deep Space Nine: Harbinger*, gamers will have to make their way across these catwalks, while avoiding death from incredibly quick, roaming droids who usually shoot you first



Even with rendered ships and high-res art, there isn't much to recommend about *Renegade 2*

Renegade II: Return to Jacob's Star**Publisher:** SSI**Developer:** Midnight Software

At around the time Origin's *Wing Commander* and LucasArts' *X-Wing* were at their peak, SSI decided to try its hand at making a space combat sim. It was a pretty big mistake. The original *Renegade* suffered from long loading times, an incoherent interface, and some of the worst

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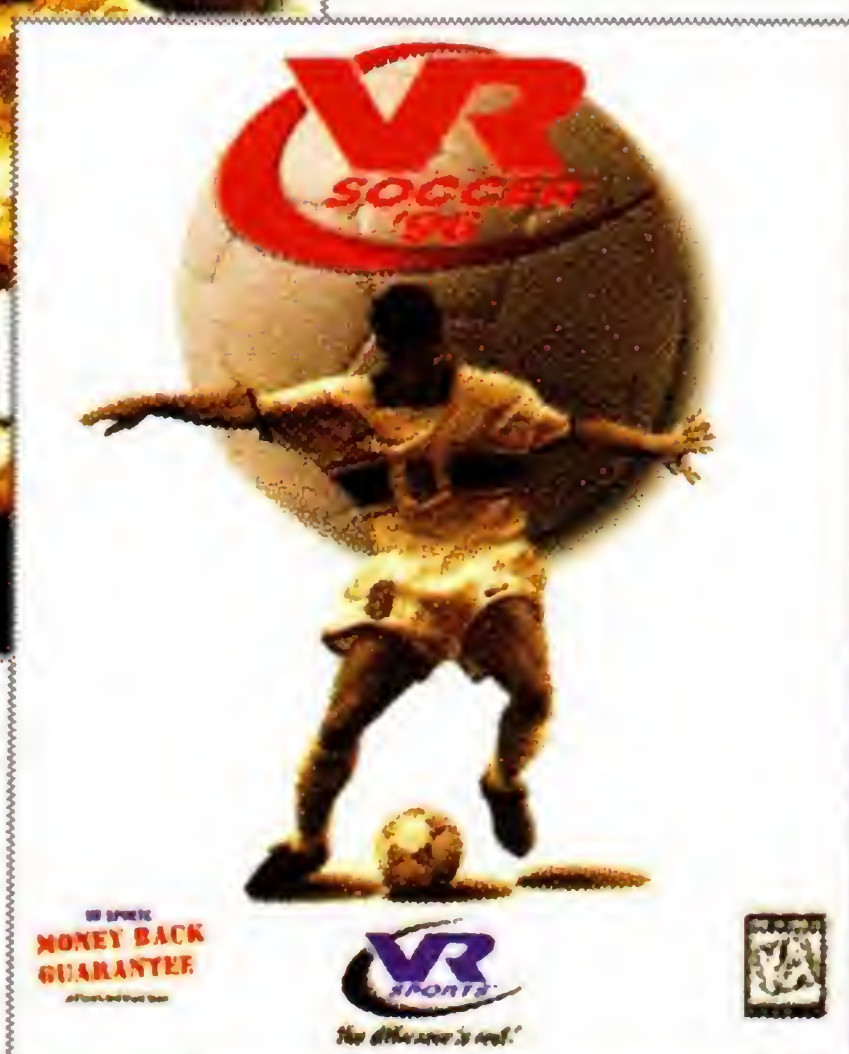
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PC



If the puzzles were as good as the technology and the graphics, this game would get six stars

GRUESOME

Zork Nemesis

Publisher: Activision

Developer: Activision

The newest chapter in the *Zork* saga, *Zork Nemesis*, is an interesting addition to a classic series. At first glance it may remind you of *Myst*, but don't let that put you off because while the rendered graphics are beautiful, all similarity ends there.

The story unfolds through video sequences with live actors, and *Nemesis* has 360° rotation, which means that when you're standing in one spot, you can look all around you. Rather than moving in a flowing motion as in *The 11th Hour*, you jump from place to place. Sometimes this can be disorienting, but since the jumps aren't too far, it's easy to get your bearings.

Unlike almost every other highly graphic adventure released since *Myst* (i.e. *7th Level* or *11th Hour*), the puzzles in *Zork* are well integrated into the story — their placement does not seem arbitrary, they help to advance the plot (or at least make sense in the context of the plot), and the puzzles themselves make sense, sort of. For instance, a puzzle that deals with the water alchemist, who was head of a music conservatory, involves music. You'll need real problem solving skills, too, instead of just the ability to match symbols. That's the good part.

On the downside, the logic behind the puzzles is often just capriciously, devastatingly flawed. For instance, at one point you must place a concert flyer on a wall, which takes you back in time to the night the concert took place. Why? Because, according to a spokesperson at Activision, "Zork is a magical world." Oh yeah. While they are contextually appropriate, most of the puzzles are wicked illogical — just not the way one would solve problems in a real world, even a magical one. In terms of puzzle quality, the logic behind these puzzles is about as far as you can get from the legacy left by the classic *Zorks*, or even *Return to Zork* (frankly, they're more on the level of *Wizard and the Princess* than any Infocom title). Another downside is that there is almost no link to the old *Zorks* — none of the trademark humor, none of the inside jokes, or other mythology.

The technology in *Zork* is extremely impressive, however; it's the kind of groundbreaking work that has remade Activision's image in the past few years. With 3D sound and stunning graphics (the game is almost worth the price just to examine the fantastic architectural environments), this game was destined for five stars, until the puzzles — and these are what really count, to us, anyway — dragged the game back down.

The engine, though, is phenomenal, and we look forward to the next game that uses it. Hopefully, the gameplay will improve.

Rating: ★★★

enemy AI in the genre. Although this second attempt has vastly improved some of the problems of the first one, it still leaves a lot to be desired.

Now the sequel is out and many of the original problems still exist. The enemy AI is frustratingly devoid of intelligence — they simply fly around in circles and change course every once in a while. Although the strategy element, in which gamers select wingmen and assign them to their craft, is a good idea, the tedious execution is painful: there's so many screens to wade through, it's more like playing a puzzle game than a combat sim.

In its defense, *Renegade 2* has succeeded in cutting down load times, and the high-res graphics are gorgeous without the need for the kind of horsepower required for Origin's latest, *Wing Commander IV*. Still, none of this is enough to keep *Renegade 2* from being anything but a mediocre game at best.

Rating: ★★



In the well-crafted techno-thriller *Spycraft*, this somber woman is being examined and interrogated

Spycraft: The Great Game

Publisher: Activision

Developer: Activision

Spycraft. It's linear. It's packed with FMV. And yet, amazingly, not only does it not suck, it's actually an extremely good game. How? The techno-thriller plot is extremely well crafted; and, instead of being laughable, the acting in the FMV clips actually enhances the storyline.

Most importantly, the puzzles are intriguing and challenging, without being nonsensical, or falling into the *7th Guest* trap, where the puzzles have absolutely nothing to do with the gameplay.

You play a CIA agent working in close cooperation with the KGB to track down an assassin in order to ensure a smooth transfer of power in the former Soviet Union. As such, most of the puzzles you encounter are analysis-based — tracing the trajectory of a bullet, questioning double agents, analyzing phone

calls, and similar tasks.

By creating some of the game in HTML, you can log onto a special web site from within the game to get update files to keep the news in the game current, which greatly increases the realism of the game.

The game's linearity is a direct consequence of having such a tight plot, but honestly, you hardly notice. Overall this may be the first game that could be termed an "interactive movie" (which Activision doesn't, to the credit of its marketing department) that hard-core gamers will actually both enjoy and be challenged by.

Rating: ★★★★★



The *Dame was Loaded* uses this gruff cop who, down inside, has a heart of gold. Sound familiar?

The Dame was Loaded

Publisher: Philips Media

Developer: Beam Software

In a market where FMV is becoming as common as it is tedious, finding a title that gives new life to an overdone medium is like finding a gem on a mountain of coal. Unfortunately, *The Dame was Loaded* is anthracite to the core.

You play the role of a private eye in the 1940s, investigating the disappearance of the brother of the cliché, noirish, beautiful female client. For an FMV title, the game plays more like a graphic adventure than, say, *Johnny Mnemonic*: You can gather items, write down clues, and there are several different endings to the game. It's only an FMV title, however, in the most technical sense because while just about everything is tied together by FMV, most of the interaction with other characters is carried out by still shots. And the conversation that's maintained in the background makes clear that this is just a thin excuse for a game built around video clips.

As a game, it isn't much of a challenge, and there's no real reward. Dedicated players could finish it in a few sittings, and it's about as exciting to play as its cheesy, ersatz Maltese Falcon story is to experience — that is to say, it's no fun at all.

Rating: ★

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Super NES

Grand Slam! Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare

Rare has done its magic again, managing to make *Grand Slam! Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run* on the Super NES look just as good if not better than several of the 32-bit baseball games. The colors are rich, the animation is smooth, and the stadiums are beautiful. Add to that the same solid arcade gameplay that was present in the original *Ken Griffey Jr.* title and Super NES owners are in for yet another great game from an "old" 16-bit system.

Of course, the only actual Major League player in the game is Ken Griffey Jr. himself, which means the game could never be a simulation. But at least the fake players are all rated and their stats are tracked throughout an entire season. Some fun and seriously wacky animation as well as excellent sound will really bring players into the game, and the solid pitcher-batter interface makes the game really easy to pick up and play.

We didn't expect much from *Ken Griffey Jr.*, but to our surprise the title turned out to be a fun, well-designed, arcade-style baseball game. The arcade approach means it isn't the kind of baseball game with which you're going to want to re-create an entire season, but for a game or two at a time, especially between two players, *Ken Griffey Jr.* is top notch.

If you own a Super NES and

even just kind of like baseball, then this is the one.

Rating: ★★★★★

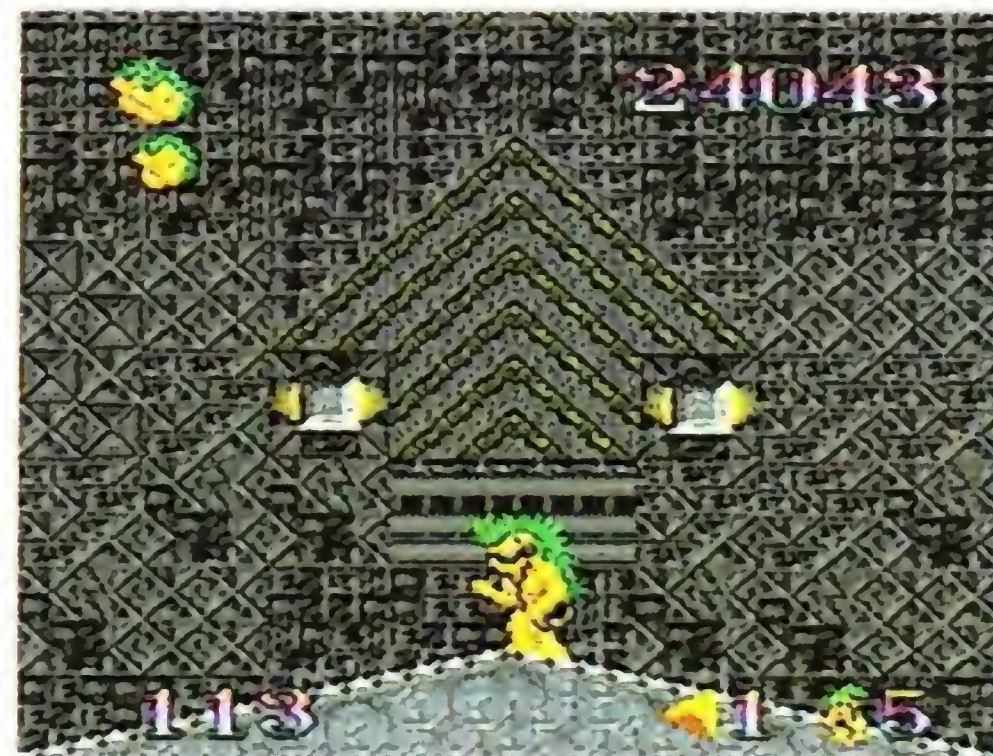
Mohawk And Headphone Jack

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Black Pearl Software

Mohawk is a creepy looking, little mascot who sports a long green mohawk and a tiny muscled body devoid of genitals. (Theoretically he's wearing some kind of wetsuit or other skin-tight garb, but there's no neckline, seams, or wrinkles, and it's the same color as the rest of him — face it folks, he's naked and doesn't get many dates.) This is just the beginning.

The levels he races through are huge, featuring legions of hidden areas, a confusing pipe system, teleporters, and a constantly changing gravity source. Sound confusing? Well, at first, it is; very confusing. If you're blessed with a faultless sense of direction, however, the map screen is nothing short of superb and you'll find your way just fine.

The most glaring flaw in *Mohawk* turns out to be a lack of tough enemies. The trick to the game, it seems, is finding your way through a level, because what few enemies do exist are totally



Huge, complex levels are one of Mohawk's few saving graces



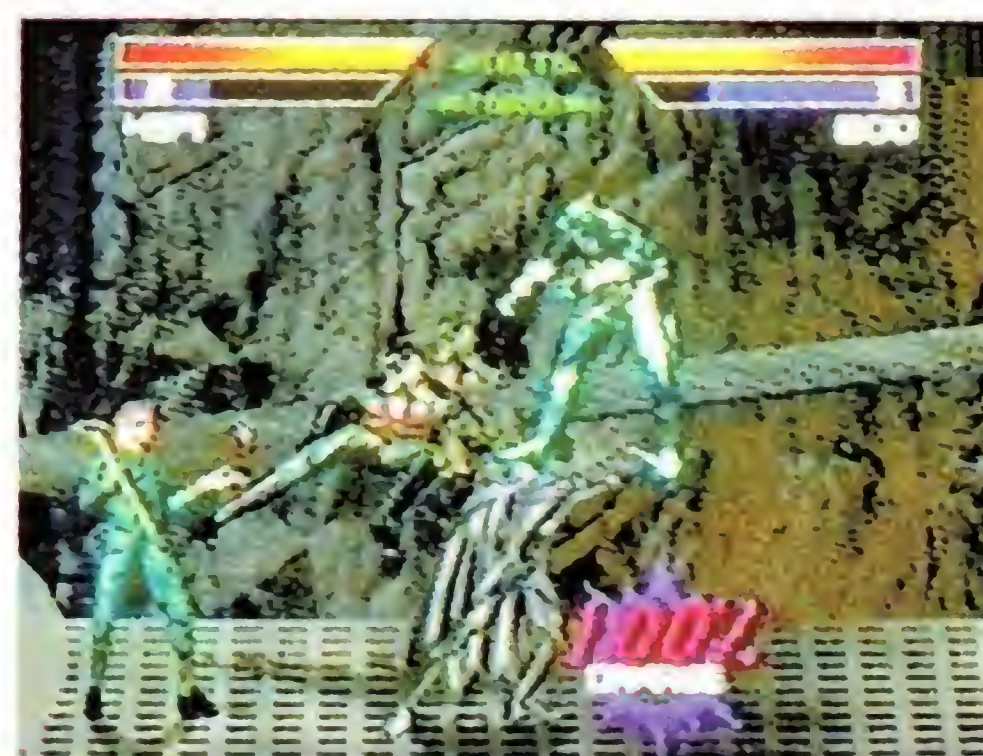
Grand Slam! Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run is a solid, well-designed, arcade-style baseball game that'll have baseball fans playing for hours at a time

generic and extremely easy to kill.

While some players may love the adventure aspect of finding new hidden areas, *Mohawk* could've been a more compelling title if there was more of a challenge in completing the task rather than just mulling through.

Rating: ★★★

Arcade



Easy-to-pull-off Street Fighter-type moves and a killer audio system make Batman Forever a solid title

Batman Forever

Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Iguana Entertainment

Acclaim's recent entry into the arcade market brings with it both the excitement of new possibilities and the dread of the company's historically repetitive, unoriginal, licensed home-console games. *Batman Forever* reeks of the old, side-scrolling action game that hit jackpot with the original *Double Dragon*, while holding small nuggets of varying gameplay that differentiates it from others.

Iguana Entertainment put a lot of work into developing fighting techniques for both Batman and Robin, and the work pays off well as *Street Fighter* moves and combos enable players to pull all sorts of brutal attacks. As suspected with any Batman game, the mad search for the appropriate gadget to suit the situation (shark repellent, anyone?) is made easy by inter-level weapon selection.

Sprite scaling techniques enable more movement and control and deepen gameplay a little, while collecting loads of power-ups to maximize your health bar creates a screen-clearing blast that is so loud, it can be heard from here to Saigon.

The game packs lots of action, but you're on a crash course with Carpel Tunnel Syndrome here because there's rare time for a breather, and each scene and set of enemies is predictable. Digitized characters never slow despite the quantity of enemies onscreen, but the

confusing flurry of fists and feet get lost due to the ominously dark colors of bodies and backgrounds.

Batman Forever will satisfy gamers' jonesings for button punching. It's just too bad that so much work went into a stereotype genre that hit its stride years ago. With new, broadening territories in every aspect of the videogame market, not excluding arcades, the 2D action genre doesn't need tissue-stuffed brassieres, it needs innovation and experimentation.

Rating: ★★★

Battle Arena Toshinden 2

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Takara/Capcom

The original *Battle Arena Toshinden* was once the sole fighting power behind the Sony PlayStation, and was heralded as one of the first fighting games to introduce 3D moves and fighting techniques into the home. But now, one year later — and more significantly, after the release of the sequel on PlayStation — *Battle Arena Toshinden 2* comes to the arcades.

Essentially, *BAT2* is the same exact game found on the PlayStation, except that instead of seeming like the coolest fighting game in your living room, it stands next to games like *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Tekken II*. Somehow, in the transformation from home to arcade, the novel, fresh qualities of gameplay have worn off. Not only do the battles feel less fun than the first title, they seem shallow and outdated.

Don't get us wrong. This is *Toshinden*, and it's a quality fighter. The phenomenal attention to detail, unusual and likeable



Fantastic backgrounds and likeable, bizarre characters save B.A. Toshinden 2 from disaster

character design, the brilliant light-sourcing, and purely original backgrounds — not to mention the return of a unique fighting system that's improved over the first — make this an unusual and intriguing game.

New bosses (Uranus, Master, Sho, and Vermilion) and Gaia, who is now chooseable from the start, bring more playing variety, while the overdrive, desperation, and new moves for the original

rating arcade

Arcade

TANK HEAVENS



The enemy is in range (top); a radar map shows the Downtown area. Cracked screens are messages: death is around the corner

Tokyo Wars

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco

If your local arcade owner purchases this latest Namco game, you won't be able to ignore it. This is because *Tokyo Wars* — a deluxe, wide-screen, four-player tank simulator — calls up your most belligerent instincts and then provides you with the power to blow the living shit out of your enemies.

What is essentially a mondo, testosterone cannonfest with semi-fast tanks (faster than real tanks, but not as fast as you want them to be), gamers blast through urban Japanese landscapes with powerful tank-mounted cannons in order to eliminate the enemies. Set up for two-on-two team play, gamers select either a green or white team and set out to blow up as many opposing tanks as possible, while picking up powerups after torching the ashy remains of enemies. The two arena choices, Downtown and Bay Area, are based on real areas in Japan, and provide a great span of territory to cover, while alleyways, underground thoroughways, street barriers, cars, and lamp posts enable strategic hide-and-seek attacks. Certain buildings, walls, and other urban adornments can be blown up or run over also, and can aid surprise attacks or quick escapes.

The chair you sit in is built with a motorized generator that reacts with each shot, propelling you backward with a real kickback. This kind of immersion is always appreciated, and doesn't distract gamers from the ease of the regular controls, the steering wheel and the forward and reverse pedals.

Different from *Cybersled*, and more intriguing than Sega's 1994 one-player *Desert Tank*, *Tokyo Wars*' real power lies in its human-versus-human competition, designed specifically to have two-on-two team combat (the unit is only sold in the four-player setup), though gamers can play against the computer, or with one or two friends as well. The only real downside to this straightforward coin-op (if there is to be more than one strategy used) is that the tanks can't change speeds. This can bring sweaty havok when tailed by an enemy because once a bulldozing, cannon-wielding blowhard is on your back, you're toast. And alleyways just aren't enough protection. Other than this minor flaw, *Tokyo Wars* is a great tank battle game.

Rating: ★★★★★

characters add more variety to the game. It's just that the conversion from the home game to the arcade environment looses the excitement, control, and feeling the original game created — and expectations in the arcade are much greater than in the home.

Rating: ★★★

NBA Jam Extreme

Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Acclaim

More than two years ago Acclaim pushed and shoved (turbo-steal) its way to the top with the home version of Williams' arcade hit *NBA Jam*. Armed with an NBA license, *Jam* created and dominated the two- to four-player standard in the sports genre.

It may be debated whether an expanded roster (including six



Fantastical feats are fully integrated into gameplay in Acclaim's newest *Jam* incarnation

players per team/160-plus NBA players), updated graphics (123,000 texture-mapped polygons per second in a full 3D environment), or additional features (an extreme button and the "alley-oop" play) improve the actual gameplay from the previous *Jam* incarnations. Especially since the mechanics and barebone original game itself hasn't changed. But what won't be argued is that the successful combination of humor and solid offensive play is still there.

The immediate concerns are the new 3D camera, which zooms, swoops, and pans in and out of the action and, unfortunately, often confuses the player as to where he or she is on the floor. While the effect is visually attractive, it's detrimental to the gameplay because it often hinders the player's positioning, which is key to defensive plays like steals and shot blocking. Aside from the new moving camera perspective, the polygonally rendered players are believable, good looking, and engage the players in fluid and nonstop action.

With all that said, *NBA Jam Extreme* is still a good, solid basketball arcade game and is worthy enough to stand on its own merits.

Rating: ★★★

Super Major League

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega

The lack of strong titles for Sega's heavily hyped, give-the-operators-what-they-want ST-V Titan system has so far produced not a single game that comes close to producing the megahit the system needs for it to be a success. Sega's *Super Major League* is certainly no exception.

Super Major League suffers from so many things inherent in both baseball videogames and videogames in general, that it's hard to know where to begin. But, if one follows the rule that an arcade game must be easily playable and, like a movie, must reel in the player within the first few moments, than this game will have you falling asleep faster than you can say Rip van Winkle.

Batting control is stiff, and it's difficult to gauge when to hit, or at what speed the pitch is coming. Also, height differentiation in pitches is nearly impossible to determine. Pitching control is better, however. It's solid, and the pace in which a game progresses is generally realistic, i.e. games rarely end up with 27-25 final scores.

Major League Baseball teams are present from both leagues and your favorite players are all here, too (from the '95 season). And while home runs are few and far between, when you load the bases and slam a home run, the glory of baseball does come through. It's just so far and few between that you'll walk away before sliding another coin into this title.

Rating: ★★

SORRY!


**No new games
were made
available for
review this month
on the following
systems**

3DO

Jaguar

Genesis

Macintosh



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through an onslaught of
undead marines and

hell-spawned hordes in
Doom, Ultimate Doom and

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Seems flesh-eating mutants
have the mortality rate

of a cockroach and are

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Doom—the last of the ~~AI~~
legendary Doom products.

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episodes complete with

new stories (Evilution
& The Plutonia Experiment),

new frighteningly realistic
graphics and new pulse-

~~KK~~
pounding music. It's time
to finish what you started.

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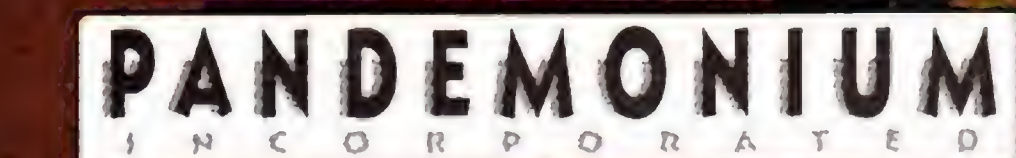
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CELL AND TISSUE CULTURE

32-bit gamer's guide

Every 32-bit "next-generation" game, rated by Next Generation

What started out as a trickle, has quickly turned into a flood. There are more PlayStation and Saturn releases fighting for your gaming dollar than even the most dedicated (or, indeed, rich) hobbyist can hope to buy. So, you need to make an informed decision as to which games deserve your attention. Every month **Next Generation's** reviewers thoroughly test and rate every new game in the finals section. These scores are then incorporated into this, the 32-bit gamers guide. Use it as your gaming bible.

Unfortunately, there isn't room to include PC games in this guide. Also note that many games included here have been superseded by sequels or updates (Sega's *Virtua Fighter* series, for example). In these instances, be sure to select the later version. Also note that where a game is accompanied by the suffix (Japan), it means that the game is — at the time of going to press — only available as a Japanese import.

| TITLE | PUBLISHER | NG RATING |
|-------|-----------|-----------|
|-------|-----------|-----------|

PlayStation

| | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|------|
| Agile Warrior | Virgin | ★★ |
| Alien Trilogy | Acclaim | ★★★★ |
| A-Train | SCE | ★★★ |
| Aquanaut's Holiday (Japan) | ArtDink | ★★★★ |
| Arc The Lad (Japan) | SCE | ★★★★ |
| Battle Arena Toshinden | SCE | ★★★★ |
| Battle Arena Toshinden 2 | SCE | ★★★★ |
| Bottom of the Ninth | Konami | ★★★★ |
| Boxer's Road (Japan) | New Corp | ★★★ |
| Cosmic Race (Japan) | Neorex | ★ |
| Crime Crackers (Japan) | Sony Entertainment | ★★ |
| Criticom | Vic Tokai | ★★ |
| Cyberia | Interplay | ★★★ |
| Cyberspeed | Mindscape | ★★★ |
| Cyber Sled | Namco | ★★ |
| Cyber War (Japan) | Coco Nuts | ★★ |
| Defcom 5 | Data East | ★★★★ |
| Dark Stalkers | Capcom | ★★★ |
| Descent | Interplay | ★★★★ |
| Destruction Derby | Psygnosis | ★★★★ |
| Doom | Williams | ★★★★ |
| Dragon Ball Z (Japan) | Bandai | ★★ |
| Gex | Crystal Dynamics | ★★★ |

| TITLE | PUBLISHER | NG RATING |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Goal Storm | Konami | ★★★★ |
| Gunner's Heaven (Japan) | Media Vision | ★★★★ |
| Hardball 5 | Accolade | ★★ |
| In the Hunt | Xing | ★ |
| In the Zone | Konami | ★★★ |
| Jumping Flash! | SCE | ★★★★★ |
| Jupiter Strike | Acclaim | ★ |
| Kileak The DNA Imperative | SME | ★★★ |
| Kileak The Blood 2 | SME | ★★ |
| King's Field | Asciiware | ★★★★ |
| Krazy Ivan | Psygnosis | ★★★ |
| Loaded | Interplay | ★★★★ |
| Metal Jacket (Japan) | Solan | ★ |
| Mobile Suit Gundam (Japan) | Bandai | ★★ |
| Mortal Kombat 3 | Publisher | ★★★ |
| Motor Toon GP (Japan) | SCE | ★★ |
| NBA Jam Tournament Edition | Acclaim | ★★★★ |
| NBA Live '96 | Electronic Arts | ★★★★ |
| NBA Shoot Out | Sony Interactive | ★★★ |
| NFL Gameday | Sony Interactive | ★★★★★ |
| NHL Face Off | Sony Interactive | ★★★★★ |
| PGA Tour Invitational '96 | Electronic Arts | ★★★ |
| Philosoma | SCE | ★★ |
| Po'ed | Accolade | ★★★★★ |
| Power Serve 3-D Tennis | Ocean | ★★★ |
| Power Baseball (Japan) | Konami | ★ |
| Raiden | Seibu | ★★ |
| Rayman | UbiSoft | ★★★★ |
| Return Fire | Time Warner Int. | ★★★★ |
| Resident Evil | Capcom | ★★★★★ |
| Ridge Racer | Namco | ★★★★ |
| Ridge Racer Revolution (Japan) | Namco | ★★ |
| Road Rash | Electronic Arts | ★★★ |
| Romance of the Three Kingdoms IV Koei | | ★★★ |
| Shellshock | U.S. Gold | ★★★★ |
| Shockwave Assault | Electronic Arts | ★★ |
| Sidewinder | Asmic | ★★★ |
| Silverlode | Vic Tokai | ★★★★ |
| Slam 'n' Jam | Crystal Dynamics | ★★★ |
| Space Griffon | Atlus | ★★ |
| Tekken | Namco | ★★★★ |
| Total Eclipse Turbo | Crystal Dynamics | ★★ |
| Toukon Retsuden (Japan) | Tomy | ★★★★ |
| Twisted Metal | SIE | ★★★★ |
| Viewpoint | Electronic Arts | ★ |
| Warhawk | Sony Interactive | ★★★★ |
| Wipeout | Psygnosis | ★★★★★ |
| Worms | Ocean of America | ★★★★ |

| TITLE | PUBLISHER | NG RATING |
|--|------------------|-----------|
| WWF Wrestlemania | Acclaim | ★★★★ |
| X-Com: UFO Defense | Microprose | ★★★★★ |
| Zero Divide | Zoom | ★★★ |
| Saturn | | |
| Astal | Sega | ★★★ |
| Battle Arena Toshinden Remix | Sega | ★★★ |
| Battle Monster (Japan) | Naxat Soft | ★★ |
| Blackfire | Sega | ★★★ |
| Bug! | Sega | ★★★ |
| Clockwork Knight | Sega | ★★★ |
| Clockwork Knight 2 (Japan) | Sega | ★★★ |
| Congo the Movie | Sega | ★★ |
| Cyberspeed | Mindscape | ★★★ |
| D | Acclaim | ★★★ |
| Dark Legends (Japan) | Data East | ★★ |
| Daytona USA | Sega | ★★★★ |
| Deadalus (Japan) | Sega | ★★★ |
| Double Switch | Digital Pictures | ★★ |
| Earthworm Jim 2 | Playmates | ★★★ |
| FIFA Soccer | Electronic Arts | ★★★★★ |
| F-1 Live Information | Sega | ★★★★ |
| Galactic Attack | Acclaim | ★★★ |
| Ghen War | Sega | ★★★ |
| Gotha (Japan) | Sega | ★★★ |
| Guardian Heroes (Japan) | Sega | ★★★ |
| Hang-On GP '95 | Sega | ★★★ |
| Hi-Octane | EA | ★★ |
| High Velocity | Atlus | ★★★ |
| Iron Storm | Working Designs | ★★★★ |
| Johnny Bazoocatone | US Gold | ★★★ |
| Last Gladiators (Japan) | Kaze Co | ★★★★ |
| Mansion of Hidden Souls | Sega | ★★★ |
| Mortal Kombat II | Acclaim | ★★★ |
| Myst | SunSoft | ★★★ |
| NHL All-Star Hockey '96 | Sega | ★★ |
| Night Warriors: Dark Stalkers' Revenge | Capcom | ★★★ |
| Off-World Interceptor | Crystal Dynamics | ★★★ |
| Panzer Dragoon | Sega | ★★★★ |
| Panzer Dragoon II Zwei | Sega | ★★★★ |
| Pebble Beach Golf Links | Sega | ★★★ |
| Riglord Saga (Japan) | Sega | ★★★ |
| Quarterback Attack | Digital Pictures | ★★★ |
| Sega Rally Championship | Sega | ★★★★★ |
| Skeleton Warriors | Playmates | ★★★ |
| Shinobi Legions | Sega | ★★★ |
| Shining Force | Working Designs | ★★★ |
| Shining Wisdom | Working Designs | ★★★ |

rating

| TITLE | PUBLISHER | NG RATING | TITLE | PUBLISHER | NG RATING | TITLE | PUBLISHER | NG RATING |
|------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| SimCity | Maxis | ★★★ | Immercenary | EA | ★★★ | Wolfenstein 3-D | Id/Logicware | ★★ |
| SteamGear Mash | Takara (Japan) | ★★ | Iron Angel of the Apocalypse | Panasonic | ★★★ | World Cup Golf | US Gold | ★★ |
| Street Fighter: The Movie | Acclaim | ★★★ | Iron Angel: The Return | Panasonic | ★★★ | Zhadnost: The People's Party | Studio 3DO | ★★★ |
| Tama (Japan) | Tengen | ★★ | Jammit | Street Sports | ★★ | Jaguar | | |
| Theme Park | Electronic Arts | ★★★ | John Madden Football | EA | ★★★★ | Alien vs. Predator | Atari | ★★★★ |
| ThunderStrike 2 | US Gold | ★★★★ | Killing Time | Studio 3DO | ★★★★ | Atari Karts | Atari | ★★★ |
| Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 | Williams | ★★★ | Kingdom: The Far Reaches | Interplay | ★★ | Baldies CD | Atari | ★★★ |
| Virtua Cop | Sega | ★★★★ | Lemmings | Psygnosis | ★★★★ | Battlemorph | CD | ★★★★ |
| Virtua Fighter | Sega | ★★★★ | Lost Eden | Virgin Interactive | ★★★★ | Blue Lightning CD | Atari | ★★★ |
| Virtua Fighter Remix | Sega | ★★★★★ | Lucien's Quest | Panasonic | ★★ | Brett Hull NHL Hockey | Atari | ★★ |
| Virtua Fighter 2 | Sega | ★★★★★ | Mazer | American Laser Games | ★ | Bubsy: Fractured Furry Tales | Atari | ★★ |
| Virtua Racing | Time Warner | ★★★ | Mega Race | Mindscape | ★★ | Burn Out | Atari | ★★★ |
| Virtual Hydlide | Atlus | ★★ | Microcosm | T&E Soft | ★★ | Cannon Fodder | Virgin Interactive | ★★★★ |
| Virtual Volleyball (Japan) | Imagineer | ★ | Myst | Panasonic | ★★ | Checkered Flag | Atari | ★★ |
| Wicked 18 | Vic Tokai | ★★★ | Off-World Interceptor | Crystal Dynamics | ★★★ | Club Drive | Atari | ★ |
| Wing Arms | Sega | ★★★ | Need for Speed | EA | ★★ | Defender 2000 | Atari | ★★★ |
| Wipeout | Sega | ★★★★ | Panzer General | SSI | ★★★★ | Doom | Atari | ★★★ |
| World Cup Golf: Pro' Edition | US Gold | ★★★ | PGA Tour Golf '96 | EA Sports | ★★★ | Double Dragon V | Tradewest | ★★ |
| World Series Baseball | Sega | ★★★★ | PO'ed | Any Channel | ★★★★ | Dragon | Atari | ★★★ |
| Worldwide Soccer | Sega | ★★★ | Primal Rage | Time Warner | ★★ | Fever Pitch Soccer | Atari | ★★★ |
| Worms | Ocean of America | ★★★★ | Quarantine | GameTek | ★★★ | Fight for Life | Atari | ★★ |
| X-Men: Children of the Atom | Capcom | ★★★ | Road Rash | EA | ★★★★ | FlipOut! | Atari | ★★★ |
| | | | Rebel Assault | Lucas Arts | ★★ | Highlander | Atari | ★★★ |
| 3DO | | | Samurai Shodown | Crystal Dynamics | ★★★ | Hover Strike | Atari | ★★ |
| Alone In The Dark 2 | Interplay | ★★★★ | Scramble Cobra | Panasonic | ★★ | Iron Soldier | Atari | ★★★ |
| Battlesport | Studio 3DO | ★★★★★ | Seal of the Pharaoh | Panasonic | ★★ | I-War | Atari | ★★ |
| Bladeforce | Studio 3DO | ★★★★★ | Shanghai: The Great Wall | Activision | ★★★ | Missile Command 3D | Atari | ★★ |
| BC Racers | Goldstar | ★ | Shock Wave | EA | ★★ | Pitfall: The Mayan Adventures | Atari | ★★★★ |
| Burning Soldier | Panasonic | ★★ | Starfighter | Studio 3DO | ★★★★ | Power Drive Rally | Time Warner | ★★★ |
| Bust a Move | Panasonic | ★★★★ | Operation Jump Gate | EA | ★★★ | Rayman | Atari | ★★★★ |
| Cannon Fodder | Virgin | ★★★★ | Slam 'N' Jam '95 | Crystal Dynamics | ★★★★ | Ruiner Pinball | Atari | ★★★ |
| Captain Quazar | Studio 3DO | ★★ | Soccer Kid | 3DO | ★★ | Supercross 3D | Atari | ★ |
| Crime Patrol | American Laser Games | ★★ | Space Hulk | EA | ★★★★ | Syndicate | Ocean | ★★★★ |
| Cyberdillo | Panasonic | ★★ | Space Pirates | American Laser Games | ★★★ | Tempest 2000 | Atari | ★★★★ |
| Cyberia | Interplay | ★★★ | Star Control II | Crystal Dynamics | ★★★ | Theme Park | Ocean | ★★ |
| D | Panasonic | ★★ | Starblade | Panasonic | ★★ | Troy Aikman Football | Williams | ★★ |
| Deathkeep | SSI | ★★★ | Station Invasion | Club 3DO | ★★★ | Val d'Iserre Skiing | Atari | ★★ |
| Demolition Man | Virgin | ★★ | Super Street Fighter II Turbo | Panasonic | ★★★★ | White Men Can't Jump | Trimark | ★★★ |
| Drug Wars | American Laser Games | ★★ | Super Wing Commander | Origin | ★★★★ | Wolfenstein 3-D | Atari | ★★ |
| Family Feud | GameTek | ★★★ | Supreme Warrior | Digital Pictures | ★★ | Zool 2 | Atari | ★★★ |
| Flying Nightmares | Domark | ★★★ | Syndicate | EA | ★★★★ | Zoop | Viacom | ★★★ |
| FIFA International Soccer | EA | ★★★★★ | The Daedalus Encounter | Panasonic | ★★★ | | | |
| Flashback | U.S. Gold | ★★★ | The Last Bounty Hunter | American Laser Games | ★★ | | | |
| Gex | Crystal Dynamics | ★★★★ | Theme Park | EA | ★★ | | | |
| Ghost Hunter | Matsushita | ★★★ | Trip'D | Wrap | ★★★ | | | |
| Guardian War | Panasonic | ★★★ | VR Stalker | American Laser Games | ★★★ | | | |
| Hell: a Cyberpunk Thriller | GameTek | ★★ | Way of the Warrior | Universal Interactive | ★★ | | | |
| Icebreaker | Magnet Interactive | ★★★ | Wing Commander III | EA | ★★★★★ | | | |

For your information

Here's what the ratings signify:

- ★★★★★ Revolutionary
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★ Good
- ★★ Average
- ★ Bad

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Write up your alley

This is in response to the news article in your May issue entitled "Just who is winning the 32-bit war?" From the start, Sony CEA has been straight-forward in terms of promises or projections, and we have been very honest with our reporting of sales results.

There is **inconsistency in the Next Generation article** in terms of sample and analysis. TRST is a sell-through survey of 19 national retailers. Fairfield Research often studies consumers — including "purchase intent." Then, you compare these reports with your own staff's "informal survey of videogame retailers." Generally, we can surmise that this is hardly a scientific comparison. If TRST, Fairfield, and **Next Generation** all questioned the same set of 19 retailers but came up with different results, well, that would be a problem.

We would strongly caution against "informal surveys" because we have been in an allocation situation since our launch [supply of PlayStation's has been smaller than demand from retailers wanting to stock them] and as a result, not all stores within a chain are getting the same quantities. A national buyer may have to categorize individual stores as A/B/C/D and allocate according to size/sales potential. Local store managers, therefore, do not necessarily have a view of the big picture.

We need to reiterate that TRST data accounts for approximately 60% of our sales. Kaybee is a top-five PlayStation account and they do not carry Saturn. That represents a significant portion of our business that Sega will not see.

Blockbuster is a "one-way sale," not accounted for by TRST and it too is a significant account. We also do business with distributors, which have a flow-through of inventory as opposed to retailers, which typically hold more inventory.

"Indeed the surprising surge in Saturn sales during the last



Sony's PlayStation outsold the Saturn 3.8 to 1 in January

months of 1995 and at the start of 1996 actually caused many analysts to re-evaluate Saturn's current status and its performance in 1995." What is the basis for this statement? According to TRST data, there was an increase of Saturn sales in December, but not in January.

November — 51,196 PlayStations to 11,979 Saturns (or a 4-to-1 margin)

December — 174,191 PlayStations to 61,621 Saturns (or a 2.8-to-1 margin)

January — 49,818 PlayStations to 13,639 Saturns (or a 3.7-to-1 margin)

For the record, twice we contacted your editorial staff to come meet with us and both offers were not accepted. To state that "no one wants to set a precedent of being open with its

numbers," is an inaccurate portrayal of how we have done business. It has been Sony's policy to report information about our business honestly and we continue to make every effort to do so.

Andrew House
vp, marketing, Sony CEA

Thank you for your letter. Of all the hardware manufacturers, Sony has, indeed, been the most "open" with its numbers so far. We would, however, like to raise these following points in reply to those you've raised.

1) Like all other hardware manufacturers, Sony only ever released "sell-in" numbers (the number of PlayStations shipped to retailers), and never the far more important "sell-through" figures (the number of PlayStations actually bought by consumers). Therefore, it's not true to say that Sony has been completely open.

2) Sure, the piece in **NG 17** did draw on many sources of research (yes, some of them merely anecdotal in nature) in attempting to construct the story of sales in the 32-bit war. But when such a disparate and bizarre range of sources are being used by people within the industry to ascertain sales performance, it behooves **Next Generation** to reflect this in any article on the subject.

3) Regarding Sony's invitation to meet prior to us writing the story. Thanks, but without wishing to pick a cynical analogy, you don't talk to the fox about the missing chickens.

4) So far, Sony has been winning. It will truly be impressive to see such openness and dedication to the truth if PlayStation ever slips

from the number one spot.

As from next month, **Next Generation** hopes to print a regular monthly update on just who has sold what — with each of the major players' endorsement and support. The creation of this system could be a story in itself...

What's the deal with the *F1* interview in your latest issue (**NG 17**)? You have the comments attributed to Sarah Dixon of Bizarre Creations and yet **Diehard Gamefan** prints what must be (portions of) exactly the same interview and attributes them to Martin Chudley. *Gamefan* doesn't claim it spoke to him, it suggests it's a press release or something (note the 'Q:' instead of 'GF:'), yet **NG** claims to have spoken to Sarah! Perish the thought I'd be defending *Gamefan* in any way, consider this just idle curiosity.

Robert Fasano
Mountain View, CA

It's as simple as this. We did the interview via e-mail, which means *Psygnosis* has a copy of it as well. We then ran it, while *Psygnosis* incorporated it in a press release, which other magazines' (such as *Gamefan*) printed. It's not the first time we've ended up doing other magazines' work for them. Pictures we had commissioned for an interview later ended up gracing the pages of several other magazines, too.

Ieagerly awaited **NG 16's** "How to get a job in the game industry." I was extremely disappointed to discover that the sound and music people were completely ignored, totally diminished! I

corresponding

couldn't believe it! If sound and music are so trivial, then why are they included as part of a game?

I think the article was an insult to those musicians who work as hard and as passionately as the artists and programmers.

Mitch
via the Internet

I would like to begin by thanking **NG** for the insightful look at how to obtain a job in the videogame industry. Formalities aside, I must confess that I was a little disappointed with one aspect of the coverage. The article profiled game testers, p.r. reps., artists, and programmers. **What about game designers?** I have a particular interest in conceptualizing, writing, directing and producing videogames.

John MacPherson
via the Internet

Of course, musicians are important to the game industry. But typically, these people are musicians first, and game creators second. Kind of in the same category as, say, a script writer.

Game designer is not generally an entry-level position, which is why we didn't include it in the article. Instead, it is often the goal for which everyone is working. At some point, as you rise in the ranks, just about everyone has a chance to work on the design of some aspect or another of a game.

Like every other videogame magazine out there, you have lost touch with what it means to be a gameplayer. True gameplayers believe that the best games are the ones that contain the best gameplay. Simply put, the better the gameplay, the more enjoyment. Why is it then, that your magazine mentions countless times that you prefer graphics, especially when it involves anything 3D, over the quality of gameplay contained in the product? **Your reviewers need to be replaced by people who are truly game players**, not people who play simply to see the pretty pictures.

David Aitken

Thanks for your letter, which, before being edited for space, contained a 14-point manifesto on the superiority of *Killer Instinct 2* over *Battle Arena Toshinden*.

In fact, we don't often compare 2D and 3D fighters directly, since they are so different in nature. You'll rarely see a 2D fighter get more than three stars in **Next Generation**, for the same reason you'll rarely see a platform game score more than three stars — the majority of new additions to the genre are weary, tired, cookie-cutter releases with zero innovation. Are there still awesome 2D games out there? Yes. Will there be in the future? Yes. Will a game's 3D nature ever help it past a one star rating in **Next Generation**, if the gameplay isn't there? Never.

Just look at our scores for *Criticom*, *Metal Jacket*, *Virtual Volleyball*, *Agile Warrior*, *Cyber Sled*, *Kileak*, and others, and our point is clearly made.

I was shocked to see **you only gave Killer Instinct II three stars**. You guys didn't even get the facts straight! Sure it is only a 2D fighter, and it has some blood in it, but not enough to call it a *Mortal Kombat* rip-off. The graphics are also much better than any other fighting game (*VF3* gets very close) that I have ever seen.

The gravity defying Maya from Nintendo's *Killer Instinct II*



Kill is the fastest, most high-paced fighting game I have ever played; it clearly exceeds the original in all aspects, yet you gave the original four stars. How do you explain this, especially when you didn't even get all the characters' names right? The returning characters are Fulgore, Gladius, Sabrewulf, Orchid, Jago, Spinal, and T.J. Combo. Chief Thunder, Riptor (not Raptor) and Cinder were not in this game.

And what is this crap about *Kill* being "what *MKIII* was to *MKII* — a money maker... adding just enough changes to be called a 'new' game." In my opinion *MKIII* totally sucked compared to *MKII*. *Kill* just plain blows the original's graphics, play control, and fun right out of the arcade. In my opinion, this is the best fighter yet to be seen.

Calvin Cryer
Lake Charles, LA

Thanks for the letter. You're right, the returning characters don't include Chief Thunder, Riptor, or Cinder. And, believe it or not, our spell checker actually changed Riptor to Raptor. But still, our fault.

Next Generation stands by its review, however. There is no comparison between even *Virtua Fighter II* or *III* and *Killer Instinct II* in terms of graphics, speed, or gameplay depth (both *VF* games are better games across the board), and titles like Midway's *War Gods* prove that even games like *Mortal Kombat* need to move on. *Killer Instinct II* is not a strong sequel. Despite its features, *Kill* is an unoriginal, 2D game with a fighting style that requires rote memory instead of skill — and by no means is it a representation of the best the future of gaming has to offer.

Help! I can't find the **NG Saturn Special** anywhere. Was it delayed? Did the stores have to order it separate from **NG**? When is the PS-X Special coming? Thank you for all help and consideration.

Steve
stebo@abq-ros.com

The Saturn Special was put on

hold just before we got started (but after, of course, we had announced it), due to logistical difficulties in getting the sample disc together.

However, the Saturn Special was not canceled (have no fear) and we hope to have it out by the end of the year — with hot previews from both Sega and independent third parties.

Upon reading **Next Generation** for articles relating to gaming and game design contacts I was quite amused to see pages 48 and 50 including a new map interpretation of Hudson's Bay. Here it seems that the Bay has a new island positioned almost dead center, three times the size of Lake Superior! What gives? perhaps **new volcanic activity** that has only been documented in **Next Generation**?

Please pay attention!
Stephen Lay, cartographer

It appears that the island you mention is actually just a boat on the bay, which was blown out of proportion when we tried the new Szeto-Wang map projection. We regret the error.

In your April issue, you listed me under the name "Gamesmith." There is no such company, the term "gamesmith" is just my occupation, just a more colorful name for "programmer" or "codesmith." Please print this so that other programmers will stop sending me resumes. I have no company and **no jobs for anyone**, including myself.

Tommie Daniel

You heard the man, stop sending resumes to him. We regret wasting the time of Mr. Daniel and those who wrote to him.

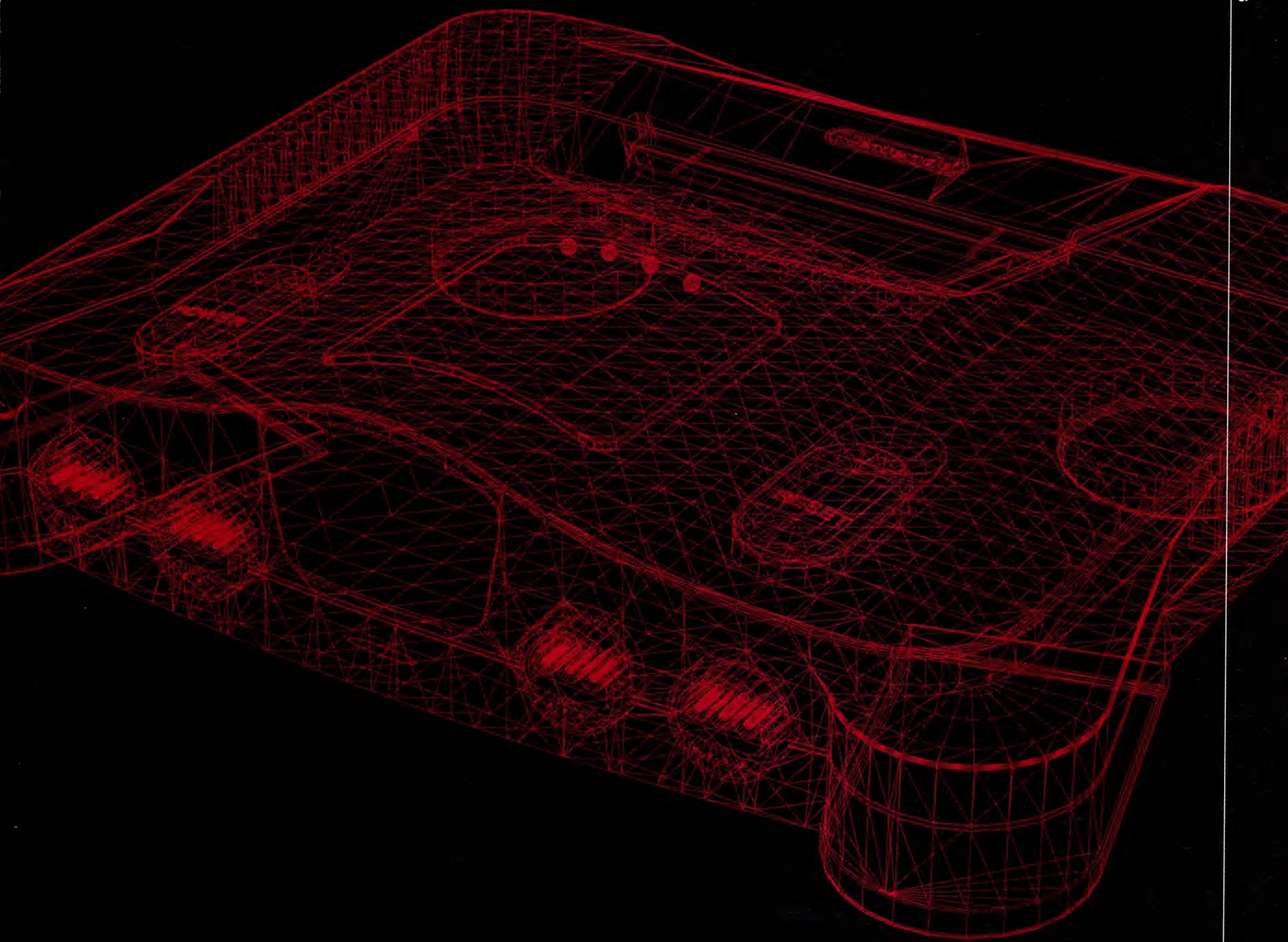
Has anyone else noticed that in the I-800-collect TV ad that uses a clip of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*, the guy's scream is identical to the death scream in *Doom*?

I've gotta get out more.
Peter Stephenson

Yes, you do.



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